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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Govt steps in to regulate air fare for Prayagraj

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Amid persisting concerns over exorbitant airfares for Prayagraj flights, the Civil Aviation Ministry on Wednesday asked airlines to maintain reasonable prices, and sources said the country's largest carrier IndiGo has reduced the fares to Prayagraj in the range of 30-50 per cent.

Prayagraj flights from February to 16 is now al little over Rs 13,500. For 31 January, the ticket price is over Rs 21,200 and the lowest is around Rs 9,000 for 12 February, as per its website.— *PTI*

Telangana to submit caste survey by 2 Feb

HYDERABAD, 29 JAN

Telangana government officials would submit a report by 2 February on the caste survey held in the state last year. The officials informed this to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy during a meeting on the subject.

Observing that the survey is being praised at the national level, the Chief Minister appreciated officials for successfully conducting the survey, an official release said. The officials said a draft report on the survey is ready and a final one would be presented by 2 February.

The Telangana government's comprehensive socio-economic, employment, political and caste survey, an election promise of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, began on 6 November. *—PTI*

Amid Oppn outcry, Parl panel adopts report on Waqf Bill

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Waqf Amendment Bill on Wednesday adopted the draft report and the amended revised bill. JPC on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, chaired by BJP member Jagdambika Pal, adopted the report on the draft legislation by a 15-11 majority vote. However, opposition leaders have also submitted their dissent notes on the report. BJP members insisted that the bill, introduced in Lok Sabha in August last year, seeks to bring modernity, transparency and accountability in the management of Waqf properties, while the opposition termed it as an attack on the constitutional rights of the Muslim community and interference in the functioning of the Waqf boards.

— PTI

>>>More on Page 3

9 Indians killed in Saudi road accident

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Nine Indian nationals were killed in a road accident in Saudi Arabia's Jizan region, the Indian mission said.

In a post on X, the Consulate General of India in Jeddah assured full support to the families of the deceased and is working closely with the authorities to provide assistance. "We deeply mourn the tragic loss of 9 Indian nationals in a road accident, near Jizan, in the Western Region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Our heartfelt condolences to the families affected," the post read.

"The Consulate General of India in Jeddah is providing full support and is in touch with the authorities and families. We also wish a speedy recovery to the injured." it added. *— ANI*

Devotees' belongings such as clothes, blankets and backpacks seen strewn around the spot where a stampede broke out in Maha Kumbh Mela, at Sangam in Prayagraj, on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

30 dead, 60 injured in stampede as pilgrims rush for holy dip

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 29 JAN

Over 30 people were killed and 60 were injured in a pre-dawn stampede at Sangam of Maha Kumbh on Wednesday as crores of pilgrims jostled for space to take a holy dip on the occasion Mauni Amavasya.

While the Uttar Pradesh government was tight-lipped on the number of casualties, Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered his deepest condolences to the devotees who lost their family members in the stampede, describing the tragedy as extremely saddening.

Meanwhile, three police sources and a Reuters witness put the toll at nearly 40.

Reuters counted 39 bodies inside the morgue of the local hospital. Bodies were still being brought to the Moti Lal Nehru Medical College hospital morgue more than 12 hours after the tragedy at the world's biggest gathering of humanity.

Several hours after the incident took place between 1-2 am, Maha Kumbh DIG Vaibhav Krishna gave the details of the casualties at a press conference here in the evening.

"The incident took place due to the pressure of the crowd. The crowd broke barricades and jumped to the other side, crushing those waiting there. Over 90 injured were rushed to the hospital, of whom 30 died," he said.

The officer said 25 of the deceased have been identified. Four of them are from Karnataka and one each from Assam and Gujarat.

According to eyewitness accounts, one of the reasons for the tragedy was the sudden surge of pilgrims at Sangam *PHOTO: PTI*

According to eyewitness accounts, one of the reasons for the tragedy was the sudden surge of pilgrims at Sangam as the holy dip at 3 am.

Amrit snan, the traditional bathing ritual of akharas, was deferred after the stampede but resumed in the afternoon.

Among those injured, 36 are undergoing treatment at the hospital and the rest have been sent with their families.

Over seven and half crore devotees took a dip Wednesday, officials said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the incident took place between 1am and 2 am when some devotees climbed over the barricades at Akhara marg.

He has ordered a judicial probe into the stampede incident at Maha Kumbh.

Yogi said around 9-10 crore people are in Prayagraj and appealed to devotees to take a dip in the Ganga at their nearest ghats and not try to reach the Sangam Nose to avoid overcrowding.

Sarojini, a devotee from Karnataka said, "We came in a batch of 60 people in two buses, we were nine people in the group. Suddenly there was pushing in the crowd, and we got trapped. A lot of us fell down and the crowd went uncontrolled."

"There was no chance for escape, there was pushing from all sides," the woman told PTI Videos.

Another woman at the hospital, whose child suffered injuries, said, "There was nowhere to go. Some people who pushed us were laughing while we begged them for kindness."

The Triveni Sangam -- confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati -- is considered the holiest by Hindus, with a belief that taking a dip in it during Maha Kumbh and particularly on special bathing dates like Mauni Amavasya washes away people's sins and provides them 'moksha' or salvation. On Tuesday, in view of the anticipated influx of pilgrims, the Mela authorities issued an advisory urging devotees to follow crowd-management guidelines for safety and convenience. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2 & 3

SC ends domicile quota for PG medical seats

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The Supreme Court ruled that domicile-based reservations in postgraduate (PG) medical courses are impermissible and declared them unconstitutional.

A three-judge bench comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy, Sudhanshu Dhulia, and SVN Bhatti said that state quota seats must be filled based on merit, such as in the National Eligibility Entrance Test exam. The court stated that "residence-based reservation in PG medical courses is violative of Article 14 of the Constitution."

"We are all domiciles in the territory of India. There is nothing like a provincial or state domicile. There is only one domicile. We are all residents of India. We have the right to choose residence anywhere in India and to carry out trade and profession anywhere in the country. The Constitution also gives us the right to choose admission in educational institutions across India," the court said.

While striking down domicile reservations for future admissions, the court clarified that the judgment will not affect the domicile reservation already granted to students, or students who had already completed their degree based on the criteria. The court further acknowledged that domicile-based reservation can be contemplated for undergraduate courses.

The verdict came on appeals filed by some students against a Punjab and Haryana High Court ruling that had struck down domicile reservations in PG medical admissions as unconstitutional.

—Salar News with Agencies

Canada claims India meddled in polls; Delhi says 'we didn't'

NEW DELHI, 28 JAN

India rejected the "insinuations" made against it in a report by a Canadian commission which investigated allegations that certain foreign governments were meddling in Canada's elections.

In a strong reaction, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said it rejects the report's "insinuations" a and it is in fact Canada which has been "consistently interfering" in India's internal affairs.

"We have seen a report about alleged activities on purported interference. It is in fact Canada which has been consistently interfering in India's internal affairs," the MEA said in a statement. "This has also created an environment for illegal migration and organised criminal activities. We reject the report's insinuations on India and expect that the support system enabling illegal migration will not be further countenanced."

The government of India was suspected of using proxy agents to provide "clandestine financial support" to candidates from three political parties in a federal election, Canadian newspaper The Globe and Mail reported.

In September 2023, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau named Justice Marie-JosÃe Hogue to head the commission of inquiry into the allegations of foreign meddling in elections. *—PTI*

SL says firing that injured fishermen was accidental

COLOMBO, 29 JAN

Two Indian fishermen who sustained serious injuries during the apprehension of 13 Indian fishermen in the proximity of Delft Island were injured by accidental firing during their arrest Sri Lanka's top naval official said on Wednesday.

Vice Admiral Kanchana Banagoda, the Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, said that naval personnel boarded an Indian fishing trawler after it did not respond to instructions to leave the area. "When the Navy personnel got on board their boat, the Indians behaved aggressively," Banagoda said. *—PTI*

₹3,200 cr GST fraud uncovered in City; 15 dubious firms involved

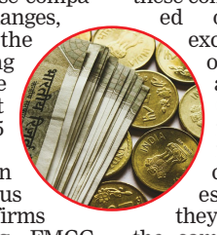
BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) in Bengaluru has uncovered a massive GST fraud amounting to Rs 3,200 crore and arrested two people.

A third suspect remains at large, Sucheta Sreejesh, Additional Director General of DGGI Bengaluru zone, said in a statement.

The DGGI's Bengaluru zonal unit conducted searches at more than 30 locations across Bengaluru and Mumbai.

The accused created bogus companies with no legitimate business operations, engaged in circular trading to inflate turnover, listed these companies on stock exchanges, and facilitated the fraudulent availing and passing of fake Input Tax Credit totaling Rs 665 crore.



The investigation uncovered 15 dubious companies. These firms reported receiving FMCG goods worth hundreds of crores, but only issued invoices for services like IT support, management consultancy, and advertising.

Despite a large number of inward e-way bills, none of the companies had any outward e-way bills. Nine of these companies are even listed on Indian stock exchanges, according to officials. The probe also revealed that GST returns for most of these companies were filed from common IP addresses, suggesting that they were all operated by the same accused. Further searches at the companies' premises uncovered original documents such as invoices and financial records, stored across several locations, indicating that the same individuals were managing the affairs of multiple companies. *—PTI*

2025'S MAIDEN VENTURE

ISRO hits ton in style with navigation satellite mission

SRIHARIKOTA, 29 JAN

ISRO on Wednesday celebrated its 100th mission with the textbook launch of a navigation satellite that would aid in terrestrial, aerial and maritime navigation among others, with a GSLV rocket injecting the payload in the desired orbit.

The early morning launch was the first under ISRO Chairman V Narayanan's leadership--he assumed office on 16 January-- and also the space agency's maiden venture in 2025.

"I am extremely happy to announce from the spaceport of ISRO, that the first launch of this year has been successfully accomplished, with GSLV- F15 launch vehicle precisely injecting the navigation satellite NVS-02 in the intended required (GTO) orbit," he said from the Mission Control Center.

"This mission is the 100th launch from our launchpads, which is a very significant milestone of India," the ISRO chief added.

The satellite is the second in the series of the Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) aimed to provide accurate position, velocity and timing to users in the Indian sub-continent as well as to regions about 1,500 km beyond the Indian land mass. Its predecessor, NVS-01, the first of the second generation navigation satellites was launched on 29 May, 2023.

The key applications of the NVs-02 satellite, designed and developed in Bengaluru, are terrestrial, aerial and maritime navigation, precision agriculture, fleet management, location-based services in mobile devices, orbit determination for satellites, Internet-of-Things (IoT) based applications and emergency and timing services, ISRO said.

"Let me thank our Prime Minister Narendra Modiji for his visionary leadership," Narayanan said, adding that future launches include NISAR with NASA. *—PTI*

- The key applications of the NVs-02 satellite, designed and developed in Bengaluru, are terrestrial, aerial and maritime navigation, precision agriculture, fleet management, location-based services in mobile devices and orbit determination for satellites.

ISRO's GSLV-F15 carrying navigation satellite NVS-02, lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), in Andhra's Sriharikota *PHOTO: PTI*

City madrasa teacher booked for raping 10-yr-old

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Thane police register case against a madrasa teacher for allegedly sexually assaulting a 10-year-old boy while the boy studied at a madrasa in Bengaluru, an official said. The 22-year-old accused used to call the victim to the guest room in the facility where he allegedly sexually assaulted the boy on multiple occasions. The accused also threatened to kill the victim and his father if the victim spoke about the incident. Based on the complaint by the victim's mother, police registered a case against the accused under section 64 (rape) of the BNS and provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The victim studied at the madrasa in Bengaluru between August 2024 and January 2025. *—PTI*

Mishap kills 3 of a family in Gundlupet

MYSURU, 29 JAN

Three members of a family were killed on spot and another person seriously injured when their bikes were knocked down by a car in Chamararajanagar on Tuesday night. Police identified the deceased as Bhagyamma, 50, her son Shashidhar, 28, and his wife Shalini, 22. The injured person has been identified as Rajanna, 50. The family was returning to Kudluru after visiting Chikkadevamma temple when the car hit their bikes. The driver fled the spot, abandoning the car. Beguru police registered a case and launched a search for the driver. *—Salar News*

Qazi accused of conducting 2nd marriage illegally

KALABURAGI, 29 JAN

A case has been registered at Brahmapur police station against more than 17 people, including the Kalaburagi Qazi for conducting an unlawful second marriage. Moliya Mohammad Maj Ahmed Khan, a resident of Maktampur area in the city, filed the complaint, accusing Kalaburagi Qazi Hamid Faisal Siddiqui of illegally conducting the marriage. Khan has demanded legal action against more than 17 individuals, including Siddiqui and the bride. *—Salar News*

Kalaburagi parents among 4 booked for child marriage

KALABURAGI, 29 JAN

A case has been filed at the City Women's Police Station district headquarters against four people, including a government high school teacher, for allegedly conducting the marriage of a 15-year-old girl. The police registered the case under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act against the girl's parents Sheikh Ismail and Irfana Begum, residents of Polakpalli in Chincholi taluk, Syed Ahmadraj, a resident of Kross and Akram Pasha, a teacher. The ceremony was at Syed's house, where the girl's parents were staying. *—Salar News*

4 from Belagavi dead in Kumbh Mela stampede

They were travelling in a group of 30; kin unable to reach pilgrims

BELAGAVI, 29 JAN

At least four people, including a woman and her daughter from Belagavi, are feared dead in a stampede at the Kumbh Mela in Uttar Pradesh, family sources said on Wednesday.

Belagavi police Commissioner Iada Marteen told media that the four were among the 30-member team that went to patriciate in Maha Kumbh.

Belagavi North Congress MLA Asif Sait also confirmed receiving information of the tragic incident, stating that four people from Belagavi city have lost their lives.

He appealed to the state government for monetary compensation to the families of the deceased.

According to the MLA, Deputy Commissioner of Belagavi Mohammad Roshan has directed the Special Deputy Commissioner to go to Prayagraj and make arrangements to bring the bodies back.

He will be accompanied by senior police officers.

According to the family, Jyoti Hattarwad, 50, a BJP worker; and her daughter Megha Hattarwad, 16, residents of Vadagaon, have lost their lives.

Mahadevi Bhavanur and Arun Kopard from Belagavi are also among those who are feared dead.

Arun's wife Kanchana is one among the injured from the group, who is undergoing treatment in a private hospital in Prayagraj,

The mother-daughter duo went to Prayagraj on 26 January by bus.

Jyoti's brother, Gururaj Huddar said, "After being injured, they were receiving treatment at a private hospital in Prayagraj this morning. Despite medical efforts, they succumbed to their injuries."

Family members in Belagavi had been unable to contact them since this morning.

Although their phone was ringing, there was no response, causing concern among relatives.

Jyoti's husband said a person by name Chidambar Patil who was part of the group of pilgrims, informed him that his wife and daughter lost their lives in the stampede.

Scores of people were killed and many injured in the stampede at the Sangam area of the Maha Kumbh as crores of pilgrims jostled for space to take a holy dip on the auspicious occasion of Mauni Amavasya.

—Salar News with Agencies

Security rescues people after a stampede during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, in Prayagraj on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

WELL ORGANISED: CT RAVI BACKS CENTRE, UP GOVT

MYSURU, 29 JAN

BJP MLC CT Ravi on Wednesday strongly objected to AICC Chairman Mallikarjun Kharge's comments on X, criticising the Union and Uttar Pradesh governments that "half- baked arrangements" at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj led to the stampede causing deaths of devotees.

Ravi accused the Congress of repeatedly hurting the sentiments of the Hindu community. "I did not expect these words from Mallikarjuna Kharge, who was elected as an MLA eight times with the support of people from all communities. The Congress is now issuing such statements through him", he said.

The MLC also criticised CM for defending Congress High Command's accusations of mismanagement at Maha Kumbh as the cause of the stampede and deaths. "I attended the Maha Kumbh. It was well organised this year. Such incidents happen when lakhs of devotees congregate," he said. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

ED raids at ex-MUDA chief's home unlawful: HC

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

The High Court ruled that the Enforcement Directorate's search and seizure at the residence of former Commissioner of MUDA was unlawful and an abuse of legal procedures.

The court also granted the official the right to initiate legal action against those involved in the search.

Justice Hemant Chandangoudar, delivering the verdict, stated that the ED must uphold fairness in its investigations.

He emphasised that searches conducted arbitrarily infringe upon the fundamental right to liberty and privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution. The court found that the ED had no prima facie evidence to invoke Section 3 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), making the search baseless and a violation of legal procedures.

"The ED cannot disregard procedural fairness. Civil liberties cannot be compromised without adhering to due process," the judgment noted.

Granting relief to Natesh D B, former commissioner of Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA), the court nullified the search operation carried out on 28-29 October, 2024. It also invalidated his statements recorded under the PMLA and quashed the summons issued on 29 October and 6 November, 2024.

The court observed that while the allegations revolve around the illegal allotment of sites during Natesh's tenure as MUDA Commissioner, no evidence suggested that he received any financial benefit from the transactions. As a result, he could not be held liable for possessing, concealing, or using proceeds of crime under Section 3 of the PMLA. *—PTI*

Ordinance on private lenders soon: Parameshwara

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Home Minister G Parameshwara said the government has begun steps to finalise the draft of an ordinance to protect the interests of borrowers from the microfinancing companies in the state.

The draft will be tabled in the Cabinet meeting on Thursday and would soon be sent to Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, he said.

"Today, there is a meeting in which Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda and I will attend. We will discuss and finalise the draft ordinance," the minister said.

Instructions have been given to the Deputy Commissioners and Superintendent of Police of all districts to control the menace of microfinance companies, Parameshwara said.

"We will provide a helpline number for the borrowers. In our draft ordinance, we have recommended more powers to the Deputy Commissioners and formation of a wing," he said. When the home minister was told that the menace of microfinance companies continues, he said they have outsourced firms to recover money. These outsourced firms behave like "rowdies", which should not be done and we will take action against the microfinance companies, Parameshwara said. *—PTI*

Parameshwara **PHOTO: PTI**

4 MICROFINANCE STAFF ARRESTED IN MYSURU

MYSURU, 29 JAN

Hullahalli police have arrested four members from different micro finance agencies in connection with suicide of Krishnamurthy from Malkundi village. Based on a complaint by the deceased's wife Latha, police registered cases on five microfinance agency staff on Monday following the suicide of her husband on Sunday due to harassment.

On Wednesday, police arrested BSS finance collection officer Akash, 22, Grameena Kuta collection officer Siddaraju, 23, Ujjivan Finance customer relations officer Lokesh, 25, and IDFC Finance Group relationship manager Siddaraju, 28. The arrests follow the Karnataka government issuing a strict warning against microfinance agencies. *—Salar News*

FARMERS PROTEST IN CITY

Farmers demand the state government to take serious action against the micro financiers, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

TWO FARMERS DIE BY SUICIDE OVER DEBT

BIDAR, 29 JAN

A 21-year-old farmer from Bidar died by hanging himself in a forest, police said.

Police said the deceased, Karthik, had taken loans of Rs 4 lakh from different banks and private individuals. He took his own life when the crop failed and was unable to pay off the debt. Dhannur police have filed a case and are investigating.

In another incident, Jagadishreddy Pralhagareddy, 49, a farmer from Bagalkot, killed himself by jumping into his well.

Pralhagareddy had borrowed Rs 1.25 lakh from a bank and taken another private loan.

The farmer sold one acre of his land a few months ago to repay part of the debt, but when the harvest, he took his own life.

Manthal police have registered a case. *—Salar News*

CASE AGAINST DKS: SC QUESTIONS BJP MLA OVER APPEAL AGAINST HC ORDER

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The Supreme Court on Wednesday questioned BJP MLA Basangouda R Patil (Yatnal) over his challenge over the withdrawal of consent to the CBI for probing the disproportionate assets case against Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh told senior advocate K Parmeswar, appearing for BJP MLA, it appeared the petitioner was before the Supreme Court for political mileage. Parmeswar said the state government was yet to file its counter affidavit and the issue was not political as CBI also filed an appeal. "This is the disproportionate asset case where the state government withdrew the general consent to prevent the CBI from probing the person, who is now deputy chief minister of the state. With all due respect, this can't happen," he submitted. *—PTI*

Govt asserts control over B'luru Palace

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

State government issued an ordinance to assert its rights over the expansive Bangalore Palace grounds, which spans 472 acres and 16 guntas near Mehkri Circle here.

The move follows the State Cabinet's decision on 24 January to reject the issuance of Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to the Mysuru royal family for acquiring nearly 16 acres of land within the palace grounds.

According to the government, granting TDR for the Bangalore Palace grounds would not be in the best interests of the state.

The Cabinet had expressed concerns that paying Rs 3,014 crore to acquire 16 acres of land for the development of just two kilometers of road would not be economically beneficial for the state.

The ordinance aims to regulate and determine the utilisation of the land under the Bangalore Palace (Acquisition and Transfer) Act, 1996, which vests ownership of the land with Karnataka. The total value of the entire 472-acre property has been assessed at Rs 11 crore as per the provisions of the Act.

"The constitutional validity of the Bangalore Palace Act has been upheld by the Karnataka High Court and there is no stay on the operation of the Bangalore Palace (Acquisition and Transfer) Act, 1996 (Karnataka Act 18 of 1996) by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the appeal," the state government said. *—PTI*

IN SESHADRIPURAM

150 seized vehicles gutted in fire

BENGALURU, 29 JAN

Nearly 150 seized vehicles parked in an open area in Seshadripuram here were gutted in a fire accident on Wednesday, said police.

However, no causalities were reported.

The vehicles at Seshadripuram station were parked in a two-acre vacant land, they said. "Bengaluru police used to park all the vehicles seized in criminal cases here," said an officer to PTI.

According to him, over 10,000 vehicles have been parked in the facility in the last 10 years.

The fire, which broke out at around 11am in one area of the parking lot, soon spread to the other side of the parking lot, consuming about 150 vehicles. "We are not sure what exactly caused the fire, but it could be because of the heat and all the inflammable materials like batteries lying around. It is likely that the fire was triggered by patches of dried grass that covers the ground," said the police. He said the security guard saw the billowing smoke and alerted the police and firemen. The police estimate that about 130 two-wheelers, 10 autorickshaws and 10 cars were destroyed in the fire.

Sources said it took firemen nearly two hours to douse the fire. *—PTI*

THE 1981 FIRE THAT KILLED 92
Incidentally, way back in 1981, a circus that was established in the same ground was burnt to the ground,
killing 92 and injuring 300 people.

Charred remains of vehicles that were seized by police after they were destroyed in a fire, at Seshadripuram in Bengaluru on Wednesday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

UP tableau wins first prize for R Day parade

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Uttar Pradesh's tableau, showcasing the ongoing Mahakumbh at the 76th Republic Day celebrations, won the first prize, while the marching contingent of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles was adjudged the best among the three services. Tripura's tableau, with the theme "Eternal Reverence," won the second prize among the tableaux from states and union territories, according to the Defence Ministry. The tableau from Andhra Pradesh, which showcased eco-friendly wooden toys, was adjudged the third-best. Among the central ministries and departments, the tableau of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs was declared the best. The best marching contingent among the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and other auxiliary forces was the Delhi Police team. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Engineer Rashid seeks bail for Budget session

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Jammu and Kashmir MP Rashid Engineer on Wednesday moved the Delhi High Court seeking interim bail in a terror-funding case. Rashid sought the reprieve for attending the upcoming Budget Session of the Parliament from 31 January to 4 April. As an alternative, he prayed that he be given custody parole during this period. The plea forms part of his pending petition for bail in the NIA case. In the main petition, he urged the HC to either direct the expeditious disposal of his pending bail application by a lower court here or decide the matter itself. On 23 January, the high court had sought the NIA stand in the case and listed it for hearing on 30 January. *—PTI*

SUV with DMK flag chasing women's car goes viral

CHENNAI, 29 JAN

Police said on Wednesday said they are on the lookout for the persons involved after a video clip of some women in a car being chased and intimidated by men in an SUV with a DMK flag has gone viral. AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said the visuals that showed the women being intimidated were shocking and asked if women's right to move around during the night had been usurped under the "Stalin model DMK government". The leader of opposition asked whether a "DMK flag is a licence" for committing crimes against women. He also criticised the police for blaming the women, who were chased till they reached their residence, for going outside during night when they lodged a complaint. *—PTI*

Multiple raids in J&K's Rajouri in UAPA case

RAJOURI, 29 JAN

Jammu and Kashmir police raided at 25 places in Rajouri district, including houses of suspected terrorists operating from across the Line of Control, officials said. A police spokesperson said that incriminating materials and important documents were recovered and seized during the massive searches. Officials said that the raids were carried out in different areas of the border district as part of the ongoing investigation into cases related to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and registered against terrorists operating from Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The raids came a day after the security forces conducted massive search operations at nearly two dozen places across Jammu as part of the strategy to wipe out terrorism from the region. *—PTI*

'Those asleep & sitting were run over'

Eyewitnesses say people were pushing each other to take a dip during auspicious Mauni Amavasya

Devotees attempt to cross a barricade amid restrictions after a "stampede-like" situation broke out on Mauni Amavasya during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, at Sangam in Prayagraj, Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 29 JAN

Shoes, slippers and clothes scattered at the site speak about the chaos that unfolded at the Sangam area of the Maha Kumbh early Wednesday. Devotees recounted the horrific incident saying people were pushing each other to take a dip at the auspicious time on Mauni Amavasya.

Several people were killed and many injured in the stampede which took place at around 2 am as crores of pilgrims jostled for space to take the holy dip.

Going by eyewitness accounts, one of the reasons for the tragedy was the sudden surge of pilgrims at the Samgam who had gathered at the Maha Kumbh from across the country — all driven by an obvious desire to take the holy dip at 3 am, the start of the auspicious hour.

"Many devotees had patiently waited for the auspicious hour. Several of them were sitting on the ground, and some were even lying down near the ghats. The bathing site was barricaded.

"Past midnight a sudden surge of devotees led to barricades coming apart, and in the melee many people who were sleeping or sitting on the ground were run over," said Madhumita, a devotee from Assam who claimed to have witnessed the tragedy.

Badama Devi, an elderly woman from Bihar's Begusarai, broke down while recounting the tragedy, saying she had come to the Maha Kumbh to take the dip at the propitious moment.

"We knew that this moment would not come again in our lifetime, and that is why we had travelled from so far and waited all this while to be able to take the bath in the Ganga at the auspicious moment," Devi said.

"Lagta hai Ganga Mai ka ihai manzoor rahan (it seems that mother Ganga willed it so)."

Ram Sumiran from Palamu, Jharkhand, reflected on the stampede.

Before the tragedy, a video of the Prayagraj Divisional Commissioner, Vijay Vishwas Pant urging devotees to take precautions has now gone viral. *—PTI*

Oppn blames BJP's VIP culture & PR

LUCKNOW, 29 JAN

The BJP government should not consider the Maha Kumbh a place for self-promotion but see it with a spirit of service, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said.

He also criticised arrangements at the mela and highlighted problems related to toilets and inconvenience to common people due to the movement of VIPs.

He also said that in the Maha Kumbh, the arrangements should be very special and not the people.

He also criticised VIP treatment for some at the Maha Kumbh, saying arrangements should be very special not people.

Meanwhile, AAP blamed administrative mismanagement for the stampede-like situation at the Maha Kumbh, calling for an end to VIP culture and stricter crowd management.

Multiple casualties occurred when a stampede broke out in the Sangam area of the Maha Kumbh early Wednesday, as crores of pilgrims jostled for space to take a holy dip on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya. Shiv Sena (UBT) Sanjay Raut said a day should be reserved for visits by VIPs adding that more than Rs 10,000 crore have been spent for the management of Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj. *—PTI*

MAHA KUMBH REALITY CHECK

While the Uttar Pradesh govt says that there were appropriate arrangements made for the Kumbh Mela, the stampede has raised questions about the effectiveness. Here is a reality check:

- **10 cr** pilgrims were scheduled to take dip on 'Mauni Amavasya'.
- **45 cr** to attend mela until 26 Feb.
- Only **50,000** cops deployed.
- **1,000** cops man 102 checkpoints.
- **57** police stations.
- **43** hospitals with 6,000 beds and air ambulances.
- Just **1** specialised hospital with **3** doctors at the mela.
- Surveillance measures: **2,751** CCTVs, including **328** AI enabled cameras.

The attendance at Kumbh grows exponentially every day:

- 11 Jan: **45 lakh**
- 12 Jan: **65 lakh**
- 14 Jan: **3.5 crore**
- 29 Jan: **6 crore**

VIP culture led to disaster?

- According to The Wire, 28 bridges were shut to public to allow free movement of VIPs.
- Only single road opened for millions of devotees.
- Thousands slept near ghats leading to overcrowding.

What happened in the past?

- 2013 Kumbh mela saw stampede on Mauni Amavasya that killed 36

Can Haryana's BJP govt poison water I drink: PM

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Slamming AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal over his remarks that "poison" is being mixed in the Yamuna, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that fearing their defeat in the Delhi polls, "AAP-da people" have turned desperate. He asked, "Can BJP's Haryana's government poison the water the Prime Minister drinks?"

"Those who built 'sheesh mahal' and those who looted public money worth thousands of crores of rupees can never think of the welfare of the poor. That is why they are spreading lies in Delhi. These AAP-da people speak lies with such innocence that people get trapped," Modi said.

"You may have heard of Charles Sobhraj; he was a known thug. He was such an expert at duping people with innocence that every time people would get duped by him. That is why one has to remain cautious of such people."

Delhi has made it clear that now excuses, fake promises as well as "loot and lies" of the "AAP-da" government will not work, Modi said as he made a fervent appeal to voters to give him a chance to serve after 25 years of Congress and AAP governments.

He said the people of Delhi, Modi, diplomats in embassies and judges staying in the national capital drink the same water from Haryana.

Haryana to file case

Haryana Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Vipul Goel on Wednesday said the state government will get a case registered against AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal over his "poison in Yamuna" remark, which he dubbed an irresponsible statement aimed at spread panic among people.

Hitting out at Kejriwal, Goel accused him of speaking "such a big lie". *—PTI*

Out on bail, Tahir Hussain starts poll campaign

Former AAP councillor and 2020 Delhi riots accused Tahir Hussain launched his election campaign in Mustafabad on Wednesday under police custody, a day after the Supreme Court granted him six-day custody parole.

Contesting the Delhi assembly polls on an AIMIM ticket, Hussain stepped out of Tihar Jail at 6.00am and interacted with supporters and local residents near his election office while being escorted by armed security personnel.

He is prohibited from visiting his Karawal Nagar home -- an alleged site of the 2020 riots -- and was restricted from making any public statements regarding the ongoing cases against him. *—PTI*

CONGRESS MANIFESTO

- Caste census
- 33 pc reservation for women in govt jobs
- Make contract workers permanent
- Replace National Education Policy with state edu policy
- New Sports Stadiums
- Scholarships, job reservations for transgenders
- 100 Indira Canteens offering Rs 5 meals
- 500 EV buses per year
- Free electricity dues for farmers
- Make Agniveers permanent

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini took a sip of Yamuna water on Wednesday after AAP head Arvind Kejriwal's claim that Haryana is trying to "poison" the river. Kejriwal later accused Saini of spitting out the water **PHOTO: ANI**

Delhi HC tribunal confirms extension of 5-yr ban on SFJ

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

A tribunal of the Delhi High Court has confirmed the extension of a five-year ban imposed on pro-Khalistan separatist group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) founded by US-based lawyer Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, citing a slew of subversive activities carried out by the outfit.

The activities include threats to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on 10 July last year extended the ban on SFJ under UAPA. *—PTI*

Parl panel adopts report on Waqf Bill by majority

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Waqf Amendment Bill on Wednesday adopted the draft report and the amended revised bill. JPC on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, chaired by BJP member Jagdambika Pal, adopted the report on the draft legislation by a 15-11 majority vote. However, opposition leaders have also submitted their dissent notes on the report.

BJP members insisted that the bill, introduced in Lok Sabha in August last year, seeks to bring modernity, transparency and accountability in the management of Waqf properties, while the opposition termed it as an attack on the constitutional rights of the Muslim community and interference in the functioning of the Waqf boards.

Speaking to reporters after the 38th sitting of the committee, Pal said the report will be presented to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday and tabled in both Houses of Parliament during the Budget Session beginning Friday.

A key concern of the opposition was the appointment of non-Muslims on the Board, which they claimed was violative of Article 26 of Constitution that granted citizens freedom to manage their religious affairs, including establishment and maintenance of institutions for religious and charitable purposes. *—PTI*

BREWERY ROW

UDF releases Cabinet note, accuses govt of corruption

T'PURAM, 29 JAN

The Kerala government on Wednesday categorically rejected the allegations made by the opposition UDF regarding the allocation of liquor manufacturing plants in Palakkad It clarified that a cabinet note related to this matter was not confidential, but rather publicly available on the official government website.

State Excise Minister MB Rajesh accused the Congress-led opposition of "unleashing a false campaign" against the project worth crores and making baseless allegations.

Addressing a press conference here, Rajesh alleged that Congress leaders were obstructing the project for helping the spirit lobby of Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Pinarayi Vijayan **PHOTO: ANI**

The cabinet note dated 15 January, which clearly mentions that no discussion was held with any other departments on the matter, was proof of this, Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan alleged.

He made fun of Satheesan, saying the cabinet note, which he released earlier in the day claiming it as a "secret document," had been available on the official website since the day the state cabinet had taken the decision to give the nod for the brewery unit.

Satheesan alleged that the decision to give permission to the Oasis Company to set up "liquor manufacturing plants" was taken unilaterally by CM Vijayan and Excise Minister M B Rajesh.

Sharing the cabinet note with the media, he alleged the document endorses the opposition's contention that this "controversial decision" was taken by the chief minister and the excise minister without making any consultation within the government or with the ruling LDF. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Newborn given expired glucose in Pilibhit, dies

PILIBHIT, 29 JAN

A two-day-old baby boy allegedly died after he was administered expired dextrose (glucose) at the special newborn care unit (SNCU) of the district women's hospital in Pilibhit on Tuesday. According to the father of the boy, the doctors administered the baby expired glucose from May 2024. Separate inquiry panels were subsequently formed to probe the matter. The baby, born on 26 January at his family's home in Khaprail Gautiya village, was brought to the hospital at after he stopped taking breastfeed and became pale and weak. The incident triggered protests outside the hospital. However, the hospital denied that expired glucose claims.—*Agencies*

Saif attacker sent to 14 days in judicial custody

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

A court here on Wednesday remanded the Bangladeshi national arrested for allegedly stabbing actor Saif Ali Khan in 14-day judicial custody, noting that there was no fresh ground for extending his police custody. Mohammad Shariful Islam was produced before the Bandra magistrate court at the end of his police custody. Police sought an extension of his custody for two days for further investigation. The court, however, noted that the accused was in police custody for more than 10 days. The record showed the investigation was over, no fresh ground for custody was noticed, and the police can seek his fresh custody within the permissible period if anything new came to light, the magistrate said. As per the police, the accused is a Bangladeshi who changed his name Mohammad Shariful Islam Shehzad to Bijoy Das after entering India illegally. —*PTI*

Woman among two Maoists killed in Jharkhand

CHAIBASA, 29 JAN

Two Maoists, including a woman, were killed in a gunfight with security forces in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district on Wednesday, police said. The incident took place in a forest area under Sonua police station limit, around 80 km from West Singhbhum district headquarters town, in the early hours of Wednesday, they said. "A gunfight broke out between security forces and Maoists in a forest under Sonua police station area around 6.35 am. Two bodies including a woman were recovered during the search operation," Kolhan range DIG Manoj Ratan Chothe told PTI. He said two INSAS rifles were recovered from the place of occurrence and that a search operation was still underway. —*PTI*

Leopard enters power project site in Himachal

HAMIRPUR, 29 JAN

A leopard was spotted in the premises of the Dhaulasidh power project in Himachal's Hamirpur district, triggering panic among workers. One of the workers spotted the leopard on Tuesday night and posed a video of the animal, which went viral on social media. Vinod Kumar, Divisional Manager of Ritvik company, which is carrying out construction at the site, has asked the forest department to install a cage to catch the leopard, adding that there is a strong possibility of human-animal conflict. A spokesperson of the forest department said department officials have been asked to submit a detailed report and install a cage. About 900 workers are deputed at the 70 MW power project. The under-construction site is surrounded by dense forests. —*PTI*

SC seeks data on triple talaq cases

Bench posts to March final hearing of 12 petitions challenging the ban

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre to provide the details of the number of FIRs and chargesheets filed against men for pronouncing instant triple talaq to divorce spouses in violation of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights in Marriage) Act 2019.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar, hearing as many as 12 petitions challenging the constitutionality of the law, also asked the Centre and other parties to file their written submissions to the pleas.

The bench fixed the petitions for final hearing in the week commencing March 17.

Samastha Kerala Jamiathul Ulema, a Kozhikode-based Muslim organisation, is the lead petitioner in the case.

"The respondent (Centre) shall file the total number of FIRs and charge sheets pending under section 3 and 4 of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Marriage) Act 2019. The parties also file written submissions not exceeding three pages in support of their contention," the bench said.

Instant 'triple talaq', also known as 'talaq-e-biddat', is an instant divorce whereby a Muslim man can divorce his wife by pronouncing 'talaq' three times in one go.

Under the law, instant 'triple talaq' has been declared as illegal and void and will attract a jail term of three years for the husband.

In a landmark verdict, the apex court on 22 August, 2017 had put the curtains down on a 1,400 year old practice of 'triple talaq' among Muslims and set it aside on several grounds, including that it was against the basic tenets of Quran and violated the Islamic law Shariat. —*PTI*

- Instant 'triple talaq', also known as 'talaq-e-biddat', is an instant divorce whereby a Muslim man can divorce his wife by pronouncing 'talaq' three times in one go

HOSPITALS ASKED TO REGULARISE DOCS' ABSENCE

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Supreme Court on Wednesday directed hospitals, including AIIMS New Delhi, to regularise the unauthorised absence of doctors who were part of protests against the rape and murder of a doctor at RG Kar Hospital, Kolkata.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar took note of the submissions of a doctors' body that some hospitals had regularised the absence of the doctors following its 22 August, 2024 order but a few others, including AIIMS Delhi, decided to treat the period as leave of absence.

"This (order) is issued in peculiar facts and circumstances of the cases and is not laying down any precedent," Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna said. —*PTI*

Leave it to God: Father of AP techie after SC verdict

MACHILIPATNAM, 29 JAN

The apex court on Tuesday acquitted Chandrabhan Sudam Sanap, citing 'gaping holes" in the prosecution case PHOTO: PTI

The father of a 23-year-old slain woman software engineer from Andhra Pradesh reacted to the Supreme Court acquitting his daughter's alleged killer on Wednesday, saying he will "leave it to God," and wondering what he can do.

The apex court on Tuesday, acquitted Chandrabhan Sudam Sanap, citing "gaping holes" in the prosecution case and observed that the prosecution failed to establish its case beyond reasonable doubt.

Esther Anuhya, 23, who had just returned to Mumbai after a two-week Christmas and New Year holiday, was found dead near Kanjur Marg on 16 January, 2014.

She was employed with TCS in Mumbai and was last seen exiting the Lokmanya Tilak Terminus railway station.

Later, the police arrested Sanap for raping and murdering Anuhya. Following the court trial and conviction, he was awarded a death sentence, which was also upheld by the Bombay High Court.

"Actually, we were not aware of what was happening. We also do not know that he (Sanap) approached the SC," Anuhya's father S Jonathan Prasad said. "It was 10 years back. What to say? 10 years back we appreciated that some justice was done. Again, I recollect my sorrowful days 10 years back, how I suffered in Mumbai," he said.

He noted that he does not wish to pursue the case anymore as he wants to spend his last days in peace. "No sir, I cannot do that. I am 70 plus. It is difficult for me to move from my place. I am a retired man and my wife is diabetic. So, I don't think I can approach at this age," he said, on the prospect of a review petition in the Supreme Court. —*PTI*

'Foetus inside foetus' found in M'rashtra woman

BULDHANA, 29 JAN

A 32-year-old woman in Maharashtra's Buldhana has been detected with 'foetus in fetu', an extremely rare condition in which a malformed fetus is located within the body of another foetus, an official said.

The rare congenital anomaly was detected a few days back when the woman, who is 35 weeks pregnant, went to Buldhana District Women's Hospital for a regular check-up, he said.

Doctors detected the condition during the woman's sonography at the hospital, the official said.

Obstetrician and gynaecologist at the hospital, Dr Prasad Agarwal, told reporters on Tuesday that 'foetus in fetu' is one of the rarest cases – one in five lakh. Only about 200 such cases have been reported (across the world) till now, that too after delivery, including 10-15 cases in India, he said. —*PTI*

Hindu couples can't divorce in 1st yr: HC

PRAYAGRAJ, 29 JAN

Allahabad High Court has observed that marriage between two Hindus is sacrosanct and it cannot be dissolved within one year of marriage unless there is exceptional hardship or exceptional depravity as provided under the Hindu Marriage Act.

A double-judge bench comprising Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra and Justice Donadi Ramesh noted that Section 14 provides for a one-year limitation from the date of marriage to file for divorce with the exception that such petition can be entertained if there is exceptional hardship or exception depravity.

The couple – Nishant Bharadwaj and Rishika Gautam – had filed for mutual dissolution of marriage under Section 13-B of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. However, it was rejected by the principal judge of the Family Court in Saharanpur on the ground that the minimum period for moving the application as provided under Section 14 of the Act had not elapsed.

In its judgment dated 15 January, the division bench dismissed the first appeal filed by Bharadwaj challenging the order of the Family Court, leaving it open for the two parties to move a fresh application after the expiry of the one-year period.

It was observed that except for the routine ground for mutual incompatibility, no exceptional circumstance was shown to exist to allow the parties to file for divorce within one year of marriage.

It said that the application showed "no exceptional hardship or exceptional depravity" to invoke jurisdiction under the proviso to Section 14 of the Act. —*PTI*

Heart attack kills woman as UP doc watches reels

MANIPURI, 29 JAN

The doctor allegedly asked a nurse to handle the situation PHOTO: X

A 60-year-old woman died of heart attack while waiting for medical attention at the emergency ward of in Uttar Pradesh's Mainpuri district hospital on Tuesday. It was alleged that the on-duty doctor remained glued to his mobile phone, watching reels.

Pravesh Kumari was brought to the hospital around noon. Despite repeated pleas for immediate medical intervention, the doctor allegedly asked a nurse to handle the situation instead of attending to the patient. Witnesses say he did not get up from his seat and kept watching his phone while the woman's condition deteriorated.

As Kumari's condition worsened, her son, Guru Sharan Singh, protested, allegedly provoking the doctor, who then slapped Singh, leading to chaos in the hospital. —*PTI*

Six rockets seized in Manipur's Charuchandpur

IMPHAL, JAN 29

Security forces seized six rockets in Manipur's Churachandpur district during search operations, police said. The forces seized six rockets along with one launcher, one country-made mortar, one each of 7.62 mm sniper round and sniper magazine, and other articles on Tuesday, they said.

Two cadres of the proscribed KCP (PWG) were also arrested from Imphal East District. They were allegedly involved in extortion from the general public, government officials and shops in different areas of Imphal, the police said. —*PTI*

Kerala man killed neighbours over 'long-standing enmity'

PALAKKAD, 29 JAN

Police said Chenthamara showed no remorse and instead, appeared happy with his alleged actions PHOTO: VIDEOGRAB

Long-standing personal enmity was the motive behind the double murder of an elderly woman and her 53-year-old son allegedly by their neighbour Chenthamara in this Kerala district two days ago, police said on Wednesday.

A day after Chenthamara was caught following a massive manhunt, police said the accused showed no remorse and instead appeared happy with his alleged actions.

Lakshmi, 72, and her son Sudhakaran were hacked to death in broad daylight by the 58-year-old Chenthamara outside their residence in Pothundi on Monday.

Polive said that there was a long-standing personal enmity between the families of the victims and the accused and it had escalated since the alleged murder of Sudhakaran's wife Sajitha by Chenthamara in 2019.

"Chenthamara believes that his wife left him due to the interference of the victims' family," the officer said.

Police also gave details of how Chenthamara avoided capture for more than 24 hours after the incident.

Chenthamara allegedly committed the crime on Monday while out on bail, having previously been arrested for the murder of Sudhakaran's wife in 2019.

The police have faced criticism from the Congress and Sudhakaran's children, who alleged that the Nenmara police failed to act despite being informed by locals and relatives of the deceased that Chenthamara had returned to the village in violation of his bail conditions. —*PTI*

- Lakshmi, 72, and her son Sudhakaran were hacked to death in broad daylight by the 58-year-old Chenthamara outside their residence in Pothundi on Monday

Boy gives ₹100 to rape, kill classmate

PUNE, 29 JAN

A student at St Sebastian English in Pune allegedly gave a Rs 100 contract to a fellow student to rape and kill his female classmate, News18 Marathi reported.

The incident occurred after a student told her teachers that another student was forging signatures of his parents. Angered, the male student allegedly gave a Rs 100 'contract' to a minor student from another class, asking him to rape and kill her.

After the mater was reported, the FIR included charges against the principal and two teachers for allegedly mentally harassing the girl student and damaging her academic performance by trying to cover up the complaint in order to protect the school's reputation. —*Salar News*

LIFE-SAVING REMEDY

Woman seeks abortion, HC advises meditation

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

The Bombay High Court has asked a couple to try and resolve their dispute amicably before it decides on a petition filed by the woman seeking to terminate her 20-week pregnancy on account of matrimonial problems.

A division bench of Justices Ravindra Ghuge and Pravin Patil in the order passed on 27 January said the dispute between the couple was not major and could be resolved amicably. The court directed the husband and wife to meet on the Pune magistrate court premises for three days and attempt to sort out their issues.

Lawyers on both the sides shall encourage them to seek reconciliation so that a "congenial atmosphere could be created," the judges said, adding that it would be their first child.

The woman approached the court earlier this month seeking to terminate her pregnancy, citing her strained relations with the husband. The woman claimed the husband said that he never wanted to marry her because he was in love with someone else and that the foetus was not his. The woman further alleged that he said he would not accept paternity of the child. The man admitted to a dispute but denied all other allegations.

The judges noted that both possess enough maturity to understand each other and resolve their problems.

"The wife has stated that if her husband was willing to take good care of the child and treat her properly then she has no reason to seek a medical termination of the pregnancy," the HC said in the order. The judges noted that apart from trifle misunderstandings, there were no major problems between the couple. —*PTI*

Men and women not equal: IUML leader

MALAPPURAM, 29 JAN

PMA Salam. PHOTO: X

Congress-ally Indian Union Muslim League's (IUML) state general secretary PMA Salam has said that women and men are not equal in all respects and anyone claiming so is only "closing their eyes to make it dark".

Salam made the statement recently in Malappuram. The IUML leader said that even the Olympics had different categories for men and women.

"Is it not because they are different? Can we say man and woman are equal in all respects? Has the world accepted it? Saying they are equal is like closing your eyes to make it dark," he said.

Salam said that the IUML is pro-equal and gender justice for women and men and not gender equality.

A similar statement was made by a prominent cleric last week with regard to workout sessions involving men and women. Kanthapuram AP Aboobacker Musliyar, said such practices may "compromise" the modesty of women.

He was referring to the Multi-Exercise Combination 7 (MEC7), a workout routine popular in the northern districts of the state.

MEC7 recently made headlines over alleged links to banned Islamist outfits Popular Front of India and Jamaat-e-Islami.

The organisers of the routine denied the allegations. —*PTI*

CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR

An artist performs a lion dance at the Dongyue Temple on the first day of the Chinese Lunar New Year in Beijing on Wednesday. The holiday — known as the Spring Festival in China, Tet in Vietnam and Seollal in Korea — is a major festival celebrated by diaspora communities around the world. The snake, one of 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac, follows the just-ended Year of the Dragon
PHOTO: PTI

Delhi buzzes with jingles, posters & poll promises

As the Delhi Assembly elections approach, the city has come alive with the clamour of campaign jingles, colourful posters and loudspeakers blaring messages from competing political parties.

From the narrow lanes of Chandni Chowk to the bustling streets of Dwarka, each party is pulling out all the stops to make its presence felt. Music has become the lifeblood of the election campaigns.

BJP, known for its glitzy campaigns, unveiled a remixed version of its popular 2017 anthem, "BJP Dil Mein, BJP Dilli Mein," sung by Manoj Tiwari.

The peppy tune resonates in crowded markets and residential colonies, promising "desh ke liye kiya vikas, ab Dilli ki baari hai" (development has been done for the nation, now it's Delhi's turn).

Congress is countering with a soulful melody titled "Har jarurat hogi puri, Dilli mein Congress hai jaruri" (Every need will be fulfilled, Congress is necessary in Delhi), aiming to revive its connect with voters.

Meanwhile, AAP has stuck to its roots with its catchy track "Phir Layenge Kejriwal" (We will bring back Kejriwal), highlighting the party's welfare schemes in health and education.

Along with striking jingles, campaign posters from competing political parties have also caught the eyes of the voters.

In Seelampur, banners proclaiming "Delhi ka CM kaun? AAP's Arvind Kejriwal or Gali Galoch Party" are hard to miss.

BJP's guarantees for the welfare of women and poor has taken centre stage with the saffron party highlighting their promises of giving monthly aid of Rs 2,500 to women, Rs 21,000 to pregnant women.

They party is also highlighting the work it has done for poor and its vision for Delhi with posters: "Gareebo ke liye crore pakke ghar banaye, ab Delhi ki baari hai" (Have build crores of permanent homes for the poor, now it's Delhi's turn). Congress, though quieter, has posters in Connaught Place highlighting its promises with slogans like "Garib ke liye Sahara, Congress tumhara" (In support of the poor, your Congress). Delhiites are soaking in the campaign drama with mixed reactions. Shaheen Begum, a resident of Seelampur, said, "I enjoy the music and the energy, but at the end of the day, my vote will go to the party that deliver their promises of providing jobs and women's safety."

Ramesh Gupta, a shopkeeper said, "All parties make big promises. BJP talks about other states, AAP brags about Delhi, and Congress is barely visible. Let's see who walks the talk." "Poore desh mein banaye 60,000 km ki road" (60,000 km of roads built nationwide) screams a poster in Ballimaran. On the other hand, the AAP's grassroots approach focuses on local welfare.

In New Delhi, BJP MP Parvesh Verma leads rallies emphasising the party's work for women, claiming, "From Madhya Pradesh to Odisha, women are getting their due respect and financial aid. Delhi will follow next."

Congress counters with street plays in Tilak Nagar, highlighting issues of inflation and unemployment, while AAP's cadre, clad in signature caps, distribute pamphlets in Malviya Nagar, with the tagline, "Kaun kar raha hai mahilaon ka samman?" (Who is respecting women?).

In Jahangirpuri, children play cricket in the shadow of a giant billboard featuring Arvind Kejriwal picture with the message, "Phir Layenge Kejriwal." Nearby, a BJP hoarding takes a jibe: "AAP ka jhooth, na Punjab mein diya, na Delhi mein denge" (AAP's lies, they didn't deliver in Punjab and won't in Delhi either). With every party leveraging music, visuals, and grassroots outreach, Delhi's electoral battleground is as colourful and chaotic as the city itself. —*PTI*

AAP's banner saying 'Delhi ka CM kaun? AAP's Arvind Kejriwal or Gali Galoch Party' in Seelampur, New Delhi
PHOTO: X/@AAP

LETTERS

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SALAR سالار

DeepSeek upends AI cost as US tech giants reel

Almost USD 600 billion was wiped off the value of artificial intelligence microchip maker Nvidia overnight on Monday, when a little-known Chinese startup, DeepSeek, threatened to upend the US tech market.

While Nvidia suffered the biggest one-day loss in sharemarket history, other tech giants – Microsoft, Alphabet and Amazon, who are investing heavily in competing AI tools including ChatGPT and Gemini – were also hit.

The rout was caused by investors' shock at the claimed performance of DeepSeek's new R1 chatbot. The Chinese AI was reported to be more advanced than its competitors and less expensive to develop.

DeepSeek R1 has soared, becoming the top free downloaded app on Apple's app store, as US technology and related stock prices fell dramatically.

The market was surprised by DeepSeek providing what amounts to cheaper technology but comparable performance.

This has dramatically changed the market's expectations of computing power, showing more can be done for less. It has also compromised the competitiveness of the US tech companies' existing AI products and developments.

Stock prices are driven by market expectations. The claimed performance of DeepSeek R1 prompted a major revision of expectations about what was technologically possible and about how cheaply AI could be developed and operated.

Investors have rapidly incorporated the news of a low-cost Chinese AI competitor into stock prices, anticipating this new entrant could disrupt the market and erode the competitive advantage of existing leaders.

DeepSeek was founded in 2023 by Chinese hedge fund High Flyer, which had been exclusively using AI in trading since 2021.

DeepSeek develops large language models (LLMs) that can underpin chatbots and other AI-based tools. R1 is the latest iteration of DeepSeek's chatbot and underlying model. It builds on earlier versions of generative AI models developed by DeepSeek, and considerable amounts of data, but is a surprising leap forward in performance and cost.

Technology investors believe R1 matches or outperforms competitors, including OpenAI's ChatGPT 4.o1 on numerous benchmarks.

However, there are some key differences: The model underlying R1 operates in a much less intensive manner. It is much cheaper to develop and run, requiring less data and computing power. The training of the model was possible despite the US export ban preventing Chinese companies such as DeepSeek from accessing chips from US companies such as Nvidia. Biden administration had introduced laws restricting the sale of certain computer chips and machinery to China, in a move intended to block its rival from accessing some of the world's most advanced technology. The training data and data uploaded to R1 sit on servers in China. Given concerns about data privacy and intellectual property have already been raised about US-based companies, having data under jurisdiction of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is arguably even more concerning. The chatbot programme code is free to download, read and modify, unlike ChatGPT. This is however somewhat a false transparency – what matters more is the underlying model, not the Chatbot code.

R1 is known to censor its responses in line with Chinese Communist Party values.

It is unknown whether this crash in price of tech stocks is an irrational panic that will reverse, or whether it simply reflects correct pricing. The future costs and benefits of AI are still uncertain. This is both a technological and an economic question.

In technological terms, it is yet to be seen whether R1 really does require less computing power and less data to train and use.

Economically, there are potential winners and losers. AI users may win with cheaper access to AI, and LLMs in particular, leading to increased adoption and associated productivity gains. Existing producers such as Nvidia may lose out in what was a market with few real competitors.

More broadly, society may benefit from less computationally intensive, and therefore more energy-efficient, AI.

However, the geopolitical risk of a single country capturing the market, together with concerns about data privacy, intellectual property and censorship may outweigh the benefits. —*PTI*

DeepSeek was founded in 2023 by Chinese hedge fund High Flyer, which had been exclusively using AI in trading since 2021
PHOTO: X

ISRO hopeful about launching 100 missions in the next 5 years

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) may have taken 46 years to achieve the 100-mission milestone but the country's space agency is now confident of scoring the next century in relatively quicker time--half a decade.

ISRO Chairman V Narayanan, who oversaw its 100th mission on Wednesday, the GSLV F-15/NVS-02 navigation satellite launch, exuded confidence the space agency could breach the 200-mark in five years.

Responding to a query whether it was possible to make 100 launches over the next 5 years, Narayanan replied in the affirmative.

"You are asking the right question. It is possible," he replied without elaborating.

Scripting history, ISRO has travelled from the era of rocket parts being transported on cycle and bullock cart, pictures that bring vivid memories, to catapulting into one of world's premier space agencies that is now into commercial launches for foreign vendors. ISRO is part of an exclusive league which has forayed into the Moon and Sun.

Earlier on Wednesday, ISRO celebrated its 100th mission with the textbook launch of NVS-02, part of the NavIC constellation that would aid in terrestrial, aerial and maritime navigation and precision agriculture, among others, with the GSLV rocket injecting the payload in the desired orbit.

So far, ISRO has developed six generations of launch vehicles, with the first one taking shape under the guidance of Prof Satish Dhawan and with former President APJ Abdul Kalam as the project director, in 1979. It was SLV-3 E1/Rohini Technology payload.

Forty six years later, ISRO has lifted 548 satellites to orbits, 120 tonnes of payload including 23 tonnes of 433 foreign satellites while on its way to the 100th mission, Narayanan said.

Talking to reporters after the success of today's mission, Narayanan also dwelt on the future missions.

ISRO's collaborative effort with NASA, the NISAR mission, was likely to be launched in a couple of months.

Other projects currently engaged by the space agency include NGLV, among others.

Narayanan, Secretary, Department of Space said NASA-ISRO joint collaboration Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite mission (NISAR) was expected to be launched in a couple of months.

"It is joint collaboration between NASA and ISRO. There are two radars--one is L band Radar (developed by ISRO) and S band Radar developed by Jet Propulsion laboratory, NASA. The whole system has been integrated and tested at U R Rao Satellite Centre (in Bengaluru). It is ready to be transported from U R Rao Satellite Centre to Sriharikota" he added.

Asked on how many more navigation satellites need to be launched for India to have its own nconstellation, he said, "right now, four satellites are operational."

"Today's launch is the fifth satellite (onboard the GSLV-F15). We have got approvals for three more. We are planning to launch one satellite in the next five to six months".

On the proposed rocket launches scheduled to be held from Kulasekarapatinam in Tamil Nadu, the Chairman said "now, we are building facilities and within two years upon completion of the construction activities, launches would be conducted regularly there." Narayanan said ISRO also received approvals from the Centre for building Next Generation Launch Vehicles (NGLV) which can carry payloads weighing 20 tonne to the low earth orbit or a 10 tonne payload to the Geostationary Transfer Orbit.

There was huge demand for these kind of vehicles from the industry, he said. Such launch vehicles would be used from the recently announced third launch pad which will be set up at an outlay of Rs 4,000 crore. He said NGLVs can be used in Chandrayaan 4 and 5 missions and also in deep space missions.

Other future launches to be undertaken by ISRO include a commercial flight of LVM3 by NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL) for a foreign customer, a technology demonstration satellite TDS01 mission to validate almost 34 technologies which will be launched by the first PSLV realised by industry consortium. Concurrently you all know, we are progressing extremely well for the preparation of the uncrewed G1 mission as part of the Gaganyaan programme and some more experiments are targeted this year," he said. —*PTI*

ISRO's GSLV-F15 carrying navigation satellite NVS-02, lifts off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

Trump invites Netanyahu to White House

The move comes ahead of Phase-2 of the Israel–Hamas truce, which aims to end the war

WADI GAZA, 29 JAN

US President Donald Trump has invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House next week as the first foreign leader to visit in Trump's second term, Netanhayu and the White House said Tuesday.

The announcement came as the United States pressures Israel and Hamas to continue a ceasefire that has paused a devastating 15-month war in Gaza. Talks about the ceasefire's more difficult second phase, which aims to end the war, begin next Monday.

The White House letter shared by Netanyahu's office, dated Tuesday, said "I look forward to discussing how we can bring peace to Israel and its neighbours, and efforts to counter our shared adversaries."

The meeting on 4 February is a chance for Netanyahu, under pressure at home, to remind the world of the support he has received from Trump over the years, and to defend Israel's conduct of the war. Last year, the two men met face-to-face for the first time in nearly four years at Trump's Florida Mar-a-Lago estate.

Israel is the largest recipient of US military aid, and Netanyahu is likely to encourage Trump not to hold up some weapons deliveries the way the Biden administration did, though it continued other deliveries and overall military support.

Trump told Netanyahu that he looked forward to discussing how they could bring peace to Israel and its neighbours **PHOTO: PTI**

Netanyahu also wants Trump to put more pressure on Iran and renew efforts to deliver a historic normalisation agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Even before taking office this month, Trump was sending his special Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, to the region to apply pressure along with the Biden administration to get the current Gaza ceasefire achieved.

But Netanyahu has vowed to renew the war if Hamas doesn't meet his demands in negotiations over the ceasefire's second phase, meant to discuss a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a "sustainable calm."

Under the deal, more than 375,000 Palestinians have crossed into northern Gaza since Israel allowed their return on Monday morning, the United Nations said Tuesday. *—PTI*

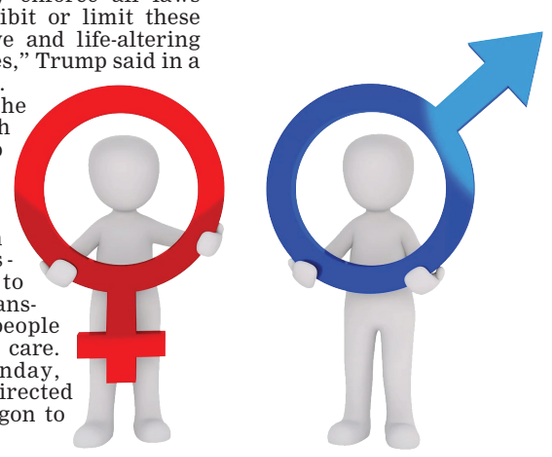
US bans gender transition before 19 years of age

WASHINGTON, 29 JAN

President Donald Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order aimed at curtailing gender transitions for people under age 19.

"It is the policy of the United States that it will not fund, sponsor, promote, assist or support the so-called 'transition' of a child from one sex to another, and it will rigorously enforce all laws that prohibit or limit these destructive and life-altering procedures," Trump said in a statement.

It is the latest push by Trump to reverse policies set by the Biden administration to protect transgender people and their care. On Monday, Trump directed the Pentagon to conduct a review that is likely to lead to them being barred from military service.



The order directs that federally-run insurance programmes, including TRICARE for military families and Medicaid, exclude coverage for such care, and calls on the Department of Justice to vigorously pursue litigation and legislation to oppose the practice. *—PTI*

North Korea's Kim inspects nuclear facility

SEOUL, 29 JAN

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspected two facilities that produce nuclear material and called for bolstering the country's nuclear fighting capability, state media reported on Wednesday, as the North looks to increase pressure on the Trump administration.

Kim's visit suggests a continued emphasis on an expansion of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, though Trump has said he's willing to talk to Kim again to revive diplomacy.

Many analysts view North Korean weapons moves as part of a strategy to win sanctions relief and political concessions from the United States.

The official Korean Central News Agency did not reveal the location where the facilities are located, but photos indicated that Kim likely visited a uranium-enrichment facility that he went to last September. *—PTI*

Caroline Kennedy tells senators her cousin RFK Jr is a 'predator'

President Donald Trump's pick to lead the United States Department of Health and Human Services has been denounced as a "predator" in a letter from his cousin. On Tuesday, Caroline Kennedy – a former United States ambassador and the only surviving child of former President John F Kennedy – issued the letter to members of the Senate, as they considered the candidacy of her cousin, Robert F Kennedy Jr. Her son, Jack Schlossberg, later posted a video of her on social media, reading the letter aloud. She warned he would continue to "profit and enrich himself" if appointed to President Trump's second-term cabinet, in part by peddling "conspiratorial half-truths" against vaccinations *—Agencies*

US Navy bans personnel from using DeepSeek AI

The US Navy has ordered its personnel to avoid downloading, installing, and using China's artificial intelligence chatbot DeepSeek. The Navy sent an email on 24 January– four days after DeepSeek released the new R1 assistant version, the report said on Tuesday. The message reportedly stated that DeepSeek's AI should not be used "in any capacity" due to "potential security and ethical concerns associated with the model's origin and usage. DeepSeek, a Chinese company, has gained significant attention with the release of its new AI reasoning model, R1, which has been described as a powerful competitor to OpenAI's technology. The company's AI model has been praised for its advanced reasoning capabilities. *—Agencies*

Musk's SpaceX to bring Sunita, Wilmore home

US President Donald Trump has asked close aide and SpaceX founder Elon Musk for his assistance in facilitating the return of the two stranded astronauts – Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore – from the International Space Station (ISS). Trump expressed frustration with the Biden administration's handling of the situation involving two astronauts who have been aboard the ISS since 5 June, 2024. The astronauts were left on the ISS after an issue with their Boeing Starliner capsule delayed their return to Earth, CBS News reported. Musk, who had previously acknowledged the request, responded on X, stating that SpaceX would indeed bring the astronauts' home. *—Agencies*

Brazil to set up reception centre for deportees from US

RIO DE JANEIRO, 29 JAN

The Brazilian government on Tuesday said it will create a reception centre for deported migrants from the US, following controversy over conditions on a recent deportation flight. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva gave the nod to establish a humanitarian reception post at Confins, a municipality in Minas Gerais state, Brazil's Minister of Human Rights and Citizenship Macaé Evaristo said. That decision was made expecting more deportation under the new Trump administration, following the arrival of a flight with 88 deportees this weekend. Reports said government officials were disturbed that Brazilians were kept handcuffed after a stop in Manaus. *—PTI*

Hasina's party to launch series of protests in Feb

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Bangladesh's ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League has announced a series of protests demanding the resignation of Professor Muhammad Yunus-led interim government for its "oppression" of the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh. This is the first major demonstration by the Awami League, whose most of the leaders have either been arrested or gone underground since the fall of the Hasina government on 5 August, 2024, following an anti-discrimination movement led by students. Awami League posted on its Facebook page that it will hit the streets starting 1 February to press for the resignation of the interim government and implement the strike and blockade programmes. It said the party would distribute leaflets and campaign for their demands from Saturday to Wednesday. *—PTI*

14 of Aus religious group convicted for child's murder

BRISBANE, 29 JAN

Two parents and 12 fellow members of an Australian religious congregation called "The Saints", accused of killing an eight-year-old girl by withholding her diabetes medication, were found guilty on Wednesday of manslaughter. Elizabeth Rose Struhs died on 7 January, 2022, at her home in Toowoomba, Queensland, after six days without insulin shots for type-1 diabetes. Her father, Jason Richard Struhs, 53, and the leader of The Saints, Brendan Luke Stevens, 63, had been charged with the more serious crime of murder, but Queensland Supreme Court Justice Martin Burns found both guilty of manslaughter. Burns also found another 12 members of the congregation, including Rose's mother and bother guilty of manslaughter. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FB

Man offers 'villain for hire' service to impress partners

KUALA LAMPUR, 29 JAN

A Malaysian man is offering people a chance to impress their partners with one-of-a-kind "villain for hire" service, according to a report in South China Morning Post (SCMP). The man, identified as Shazali Sulaiman, 28, took to social media to promote his service, earlier this month, claiming he could help the clients demonstrate their masculinity and leave a lasting impression on their partners. Sulaiman shared a photo of himself with messy hair and an unlit cigarette to enhance his tough-guy image on Instagram. He also stated that the service was not limited to men and that females could also seek his assistance. As per Malaysian law, anyone found guilty of sexual harassment may be forced to pay compensation for any financial or moral damage. *—Agencies*

Ukrainian drones target Russian nuclear plant

MOSCOW, 29 JAN

Russian officials said on Wednesday that the country's energy infrastructure, including a nuclear power plant, come under attack by at least 100 Ukrainian drones overnight. Ukraine also reported strikes.

The continuing barrages were accompanied by barbs from the two countries' presidents, suggesting little prospect of peace talks.

The Russian Ministry of Defence said on Telegram that 104 drones were involved in raids across western Russia, many targeting power and oil facilities.

Local officials claimed that air defence systems had destroyed one drone that had attempted to strike the nuclear power plant in the western region of Smolensk.

"According to preliminary information, one of the drones was shot down during an attempt to attack a nuclear power facility," Governor Vasily Anokhin said on the Telegram messaging app. "There were no casualties or damage."

Firefighters douse flames after a Russian attack on a civil factory in Kharkiv, Ukraine **PHOTO: PTI**

The Smolensk Nuclear Power Plant, the largest power generating plant in Russia's northwest, was working normally on Wednesday morning, RIA state news agency reported.

Ukraine's military said on Wednesday that Russia launched an overnight drone attack of its own, resulting in air alerts in multiple regions.

A port in the Odesa region was also reportedly targeted, while debris from a destroyed drone fell near a metro station in the capital, Kyiv, said Mayor Vitali Klitschko. *—PTI*

2 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire in West Bank

JERUSALEM, 29 JAN

The Palestinian Health Ministry says two Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire in the occupied West Bank overnight and into Wednesday.

A 23-year-old man was shot dead in Tulkarem and a 25-year-old man was killed in a strike on Jenin, where Israel launched a large operation earlier this month.

The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its reports. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence since Hamas' 7 October, 2023, attack out of the Gaza Strip, igniting the war. The ministry says over 800 Palestinians have been killed. Most appeared militants killed in Israeli raids, but it also includes people killed during violent protests, as well as civilian bystanders.

There was also an uptick in settler violence against Palestinians and Palestinian attacks on Israelis since the start of the war. *—PTI*

GOVT UNAWARE

UK report cites 'Hindu nationalist extremism'

LONDON, 29 JAN

Two types of extremism with their origins in the Indian subcontinent – pro-Khalistan extremism and Hindu nationalist extremism – have been flagged as threats to "understand" in a leaked report into the UK government's Extremism Review.

'Extremely Confused: The government's new counter-extremism review revealed', authored by Andrew Gilligan and Dr Paul Scott for the Policy Exchange think tank released earlier this week, claims "Hindu nationalist extremism" has found a mention in such a review for the first time. Minister Dan Jarvis said the claims did not represent government policy.

In the leaked report, the longest section is labelled "Understand" and lists nine types of extremism in the following order: "Islamist, extreme right-wing, extreme misogyny, pro-Khalistan extremism, Hindu nationalist extremism, environmental extremism, Left wing, anarchist and single-issue extremism (LASI), violence fascination and conspiracy theories".

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

It says: "Hindu nationalist extremism (also referred to as Hindutva, which roughly translates as 'Hinduness') was not mentioned in the 2023 Independent Review of Prevent – something that with hindsight can be seen as a mistake. Given the violence which occurred in Leicester in September 2022 between Hindus and Muslims, the government is correct to place Hindu nationalist extremism under the spotlight – not least as knowledge of it is generally low." *—PTI*

Rajapaksa's son indicted for diversion of funds

COLOMBO, 29 JAN

Former Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa's elder son has been indicted in the High Court for alleged misappropriation from an Indian investment prior to 2015.

Namal Rajapaksa, 38, had been arrested in June 2016 for the alleged misuse of 70M Sri Lankan rupees from the Krish hotel project money to develop the game of rugby, for which he had been a Sri Lanka international player.

The Krish hotel project located in the heart of Colombo commercial district was aborted, and the unfinished construction remains. Recently its unsafe status was questioned in another court for the danger posed to passersby.

Namal Rajapaksa was quizzed recently by the police after the Anura Kumara Dissanayake-led National People's Power government revived the Krish case stalled since 2016.

A week later, his younger brother Yoshitha was arrested in the revival of a similar property case. He was released on bail on Monday.

Namal Rajapaksa posted on X, "It is evident that the present government has launched a political witch hunt against the Rajapaksa family."

Mahinda Rajapaksa has also faced government ire as he had failed to vacate his official residence. The government accused the senior Rajapaksa of enjoying benefits at taxpayers' expense. *—PTI*

PARTING WAYS

3 junta-led nations quit Ecowas

ABUJA, 29 JAN

PHOTO: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

The three junta-led West African nations of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso have formally withdrawn from the 15-nation Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), the regional bloc said on Wednesday. It was the culmination of a year-long process during which the group tried to avert its unprecedented disintegration.

Their withdrawal, first announced a year ago, "has become effective today", Ecowas said. The bloc, however, said it has also decided to "keep Ecowas' doors open," requesting member nations to continue to accord the three countries privileges of membership, including free movement within the region with an Ecowas passport.

The bloc was established in 1975 with one goal: "To promote co-operation and integration ... in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability."

It has since grown to become the region's top political authority, often collaborating with states to solve domestic challenges from politics to economy and security.

After coming into power, the juntas in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso announced exit from Ecowas and created their own security partnership, the Alliance of Sahel States, in September. *—PTI*

15-yr-old Pak girl killed for making TikTok videos

KARACHI, 29 JAN

A 15-year-old girl born and raised in the US has been killed by her father and uncle in Balochistan province for making TikTok videos, police said on Wednesday.

The accused have confessed to the "honour killing" after the girl and her family arrived in Quetta on 15 January.

"The father said he had told his daughter to stop making videos on TikTok but she refused to listen. So he and his brother-in-law decided to kill her while they were visiting their home town Quetta," senior police official Abad Baloch said.

The official said the accused had initially claimed that the girl was hit by stray bullets during an aerial firing outside their home and rushed to the hospital where she was declared dead. *—PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Odisha to sign MoUs worth Rs 3L cr

BHUBANESWAR, 29 JAN

Odisha government will sign at least 30 MoUs for investment of about Rs 3 lakh crore on the second day of Utkarsh Odisha-Make in Odisha Conclave on Wednesday, a senior officer said. The MoUs are likely to be signed in sectors such as renewable energy, energy, food processing, tourism and agri-enterprises, he said. Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Industries department, Hemant Sharma said about 30 MoUs will be signed in the first half of Wednesday, which will bring investment worth Rs 3 lakh crore in Odisha.

On the first day of the summit, Odisha on Tuesday signed 54 MoUs worth Rs 4.50 lakh crore. Adani Group has committed to invest the highest amount. *—PTI*

Rupee rises 1P to close at 86.56 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

The rupee pared its initial losses and settled for the day on a positive note, higher by 1 paisa to close at 86.56 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, supported by positive domestic markets, while a strong US dollar and a recovery in crude oil prices capped sharp gains.

Forex traders said the US dollar gained on expectations of a no rate cut by the Fed in its Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) decision. Besides, global risk sentiments were dampened amid tariff threats by the US President Donald Trump, they said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.58, and during the day touched a high of 86.49 and a low of 86.61 against the American currency. The local unit settled on a positive note at 86.56 (provisional), registering a rise of 1 paisa over its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee depreciated 26 paise to close at 86.57 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

MCX to remain open on Union Budget Day

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

The Multi Commodity Exchange of India (MCX) on Wednesday said the exchange will conduct a special live trading session on the day of the Union Budget presentation on February 1. The exchange will remain open for normal trade from 9 am to 5 pm, MCX said in a statement.

MCX will be open on February 1 (Saturday) to make available the trading platform for market participants on account of the presentation of the Union Budget, supporting their real-time risk management and hedging requirements, it added. *—PTI*

Triveni Turbine bags Rs 2.9 billion order from NTPC

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Triveni Turbine on Wednesday said it has secured an order worth Rs 2.9 lakh crore from power giant NTPC. The order is to install a Co2-based standalone Energy Storage System (ESS) of 160 MWh at NTPC Kudgi STPP (Super Thermal Power Plant) in Karnataka, the company said in an exchange filing. The project shall be executed on a turnkey basis by Triveni Turbine along with technology partner Energy Dome over a period of 18 months. Dhruv M Sawhney, Chairman & Managing Director, Triveni Turbines, said, "This is a landmark order from NTPC aiming to accelerate India's energy transition efforts by making renewable energy (RE) dispatchable. Our long-term partnership with Energy Dome, aims to deliver sustainable alternative green storage of energy also aligns well with our energy transition solutions." *—PTI*

Bear loosens its hold as market surges 1%

Ahead of Union Budget, Sensex jumped 631.55 points while Nifty soared by 205.85 points

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged nearly 1 per cent on Wednesday, buoyed by a rally in IT, capital goods and industrial stocks amid a firm trend in global markets.

However, unabated selling by foreign investors ahead of the Union Budget kept market sentiment extremely cautious, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 631.55 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 76,532.96. During the day, it jumped 698.32 points or 0.92 per cent to 76,599.73.

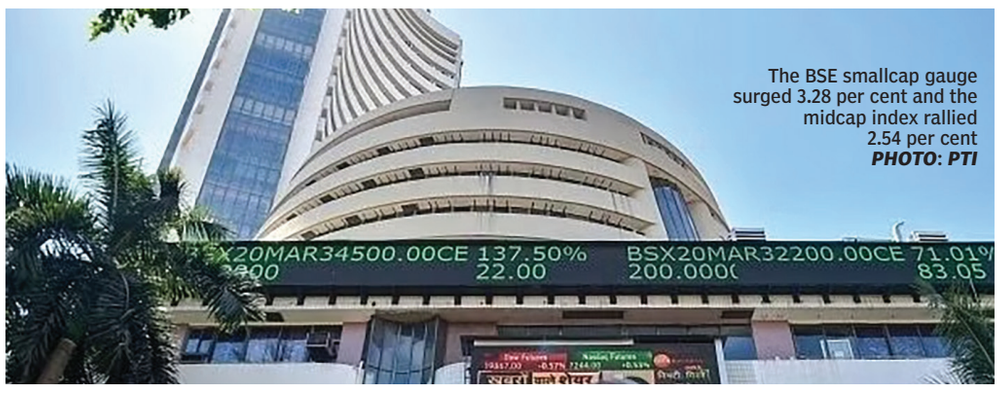
As many as 2,978 stocks advanced while 1,011 declined and 93 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty soared 205.85 points or 0.90 per cent to 23,163.10.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Zomato jumped nearly 7 per cent. Tata Motors, Infosys, UltraTech Cement, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finance were the other major gainers.

In contrast, ITC Hotels, Bharti Airtel, Maruti, Asian Paints and ITC were among the laggards.

The BSE smallcap gauge surged 3.28 per cent and the midcap index rallied 2.54 per cent.



The BSE smallcap gauge surged 3.28 per cent and the midcap index rallied 2.54 per cent
PHOTO: PTI

Among BSE sectoral indices, realty jumped 3.10 per cent, industrials (2.94 per cent), capital goods (2.70 per cent), IT (2.65 per cent), BSE Focused IT (2.63 per cent), commodities (2.30 per cent) and healthcare (2.20 per cent).

FMCG emerged as the only laggard.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the positive territory. Markets in Shanghai and Hong Kong were closed due to holidays.

European markets were trading mostly in the green. US markets ended higher on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,920.69 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

Adani Power Q3 net profit rises 7% to ₹2,940 cr

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Adani Power on Wednesday posted a 7 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 2,940 crore for the December quarter due to higher revenues on the back of higher electricity sale volume.

"Consolidated total revenue for Q3 FY25 higher by 11 per cent to Rs 14,833 crore vs Rs 13,355 crore in Q3 FY24, primarily due to higher volume," a company statement said.

According to the statement, its consolidated profit after tax increased 7 per cent to Rs 2,940 crore in the quarter compared to Rs 2,738 crore a year ago.

Maruti Suzuki India said its consolidated net profit jumped 16 per cent to Rs 3,727 crore in the December quarter, riding on higher sales. The country's largest carmaker had reported a net profit of Rs 3,207 crore in the October-December period of last fiscal.

Total revenue from operations grew to Rs 38,764 crore in the third quarter compared to Rs 33,513 crore in the year-ago period, Maruti Suzuki India said in a regulatory filing.

Shares of state-owned engineering firm BHEL jumped nearly 5 per cent on Wednesday after it posted over two-fold jump in consolidated net profit for December quarter 2024-25.

The stock rallied 4.74 per cent to Rs 196.50 on the BSE.

At the NSE, it surged 4.72 per cent to Rs 196.49. *—PTI*

Centre clears Rs 34,300 cr National Mineral Mission

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The government on Wednesday approved a Rs 16,300-crore National Critical Mineral Mission, envisaging a total outlay of Rs 34,300 crore spread over seven years, with an aim to achieve self-reliance and accelerate India's journey towards green energy transition.

According a release by the mines ministry, public sector enterprises are expected to contribute Rs 18,000 crore to the mission which aims at promoting exploration of critical minerals within the country and at offshore locations.

Critical minerals such as copper, lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earth are essential raw materials required to fuel the growth of rapidly-growing clean energy technologies and their expanding uses ranging from wind turbines and electricity networks to electric vehicles and battery manufacturing.

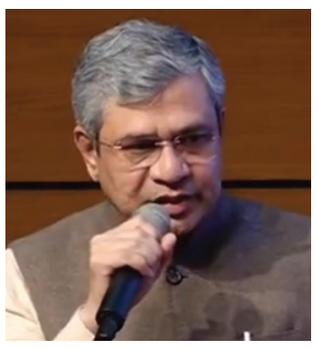


PHOTO:PTI

Demand for these minerals is growing with clean energy transitions gathering momentum worldwide.

Briefing the media after the Cabinet meeting, information and broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the mission aims to reduce the dependence on import of critical minerals and ensure self-reliance.

Stating that the critical mineral is essential for the economy, the minister said that major objectives of this mission are to increase exploration, reduce import dependence, acquire mineral blocks overseas, develop technologies for processing of critical minerals and recyle the minerals.

A comprehensive plan, he said, is made in this mission.

"It has expenditure of Rs 16,300 crore and expected investment of Rs 18,000 crore by PSUs, etc," the ministry said.

The NCMM will encompass all stages of the value chain, including mineral exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing, and recovery from end-of-life products. The mission will intensify the exploration of critical minerals within the country and in its offshore areas. It aims to create a fast-track regulatory approval process for critical mineral mining projects. Additionally, the mission will offer financial incentives for critical mineral exploration and promote the recovery of these resources from overburden and tailings. *—PTI*

DECLINING LOAN GROWTH

Banks facing margin pressure amid high interest rate: S&P

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Indian banks are facing margin pressure as loan growth slows amid high interest rates, according to a report by S&P Global Market Intelligence.

The report highlighted that the aggregate loan growth of six of India's largest banks--both private and state-owned--is expected to decline to 12.3 per cent in the fiscal year ending 31 March, 2025. This is a sharp slowdown from the 22.5 per cent growth recorded in the previous fiscal year.

However, despite the slowdown in loan growth, the report stated that the Indian banks continue to report higher net profits, although at a slower pace.

PHOTO:PIXABAY

The report suggested that net interest margins (NIMs) of most banks are likely to decline in the coming months as deposit rates catch up and monetary easing comes into play.

Many banks have adjusted their lending strategies, reducing consumer loans while focusing more on mobilising retail deposits.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has maintained its benchmark interest rates at a high level, even as central banks in the US and Europe began easing their monetary policies in 2024.

RBI has kept its focus on inflation control, but the report believed it has also allowed the rupee to depreciate as a de-facto easing measure. Since November 1, 2024, the rupee has fallen 2.8 per cent and hit an all-time low recently.

To control excessive lending to riskier customers, the report added that RBI raised risk weights on unsecured lending in November 2024 by 25 percentage points. This measure impacted personal loans, credit card loans, and credit to non-banking financial companies (NBFCs). *—PTI*

Gold strikes fresh all-time high of Rs 83,750 per 10g

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Gold prices rallied Rs 910 to hit a fresh all-time high of Rs 83,750 per 10g in the national capital on Wednesday due to heavy buying from jewellers and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 82,840 per 10g in the previous trading session.

The bright metal had jumped Rs 4,360 or 5.5 per cent to Rs 83,750 per 10g from Rs 79,390 per 10g on 1 January.

Snapping a two-day losing run, gold of 99.5 per cent purity also surged Rs 910 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 83,350 per 10g on Wednesday. The yellow metal finished at Rs 82,440 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Silver climbed Rs 1,000 to Rs 93,000 per kg from Rs 92,000 per kg in the previous trading close.

In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 228 to hit a fresh lifetime high of Rs 80,517 per 10g.

Also, contracts for April delivery climbed Rs 199, or 0.2 per cent, to hit a fresh peak of Rs 81,098 per 10g for the first time on Wednesday.

PHOTO:ANI

- However, Comex silver futures in the Asian market hours quoted higher at USD 30.99 per ounce.

Silver futures for March delivery advanced Rs 105, or 0.12 per cent, to Rs 91,156 per kg from the previous close of Rs 91,051 per kg on Tuesday.

Globally, Comex gold futures traded flat at USD 2,794.70 per ounce.

However, Comex silver futures in the Asian market hours quoted higher at USD 30.99 per ounce. *—PTI*

Govt removes curbs on import of certain kinds of boats, vehicles

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

The government on Wednesday removed import restrictions on certain kinds of patrol boats and vehicles with immediate effect, according to a notification.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said the import policy of patrol or surveillance boats, air-cushion vehicles, and remote-operated vehicles is "revised from restricted to free with immediate effect".

Import of these items stood at USD 0.46 million in April-November this fiscal. They are mainly imported from France, Germany, Hong Kong and the UK.

In a separate notice, the DGFT said it has introduced an online module for filing annual RoDTEP returns.

Under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP), various central and state duties, taxes, and levies imposed on input products, among others, are refunded to exporters. The current RoDTEP rates are in the range of 0.3 per cent to 4.3 per cent. *—PTI*

Digital payments rise 11.1 pc at Sept-end 2024: RBI data

MUMBAI, 29 JAN

Digital payments across the country registered an 11.11 per cent year-on-year rise as on September 2024, according to RBI's index that measures the adoption of online transactions.

RBI's Digital Payments Index (RBI-DPI) for September 2024 stands at 465.33 as against 445.5 for March 2024, the Reserve Bank said in a statement on Wednesday. The central bank had announced the construction of a composite RBI-DPI in March 2018 as a base to capture the extent of digitisation of payments across the country. The index comprises five broad parameters that enable the measurement of the deepening and penetration of digital payments in the country over different periods. These parameters are Payment Enablers (weightage 25 per cent); Payment Infrastructure – Demand-side factors (10 per cent); Payment Infrastructure – Supply-side factors (15 per cent); Payment Performance (45 per cent); and Consumer Centricity (5 per cent). *—PTI*

Maruti reappoints Takeuchi as MD & CEO for new term

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Maruti Suzuki India Ltd on Wednesday said its board has approved the reappointment of Hisashi Takeuchi as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer for a further period of three years with effect from 1 April, 2025.

The board inits meeting held on 29 January, 2025 approved the appointment of Takeuchi as MD and CEO for a further period of three years till 31 March, 2028, Maruti Suzuki India said in a regulatory filing.

Takeuchi was first appointed as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer with effect from April 1, 2022, consequent to the completion of the term of his predecessor Kenichi Ayukawa on 31 March, 2022.

He has been on the Board of Maruti Suzuki since July 2019 and was Joint Managing Director (Commercial) from April 2021 till his elevation.

He joined Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC) in 1986 and has a vast experience in the international operations at SMC. *—PTI*

BOOST TO HYDROGEN MISSION

Tata makes 1st hydrogen transport pipes

RANCHI, 29 JAN

Tata Steel on Wednesday claimed that it has become India's first steel company to develop pipes for hydrogen transportation, marking a significant milestone in the country's hydrogen mission.

The pipes, processed at Tata Steel's Khopoli plant using steel manufactured at its Kalinganagar plant, have successfully met all the critical properties required for hydrogen transportation, the company said in a statement.

The complete technology development, from designing and manufacturing hot-rolled steel to producing the pipes, was done entirely in-house, demonstrating Tata Steel's ability to deliver critical energy infrastructure.

In 2024, Tata Steel became the first Indian steel company to produce hot-rolled steel for the transportation of gaseous hydrogen.

In 2024, Tata Steel became the first Indian steel company to produce hot-rolled steel for the transportation of gaseous hydrogen *PHOTO: X*

The new hydrogen-compliant API X65 grade pipes can be used for transportation of 100 per cent pure gaseous hydrogen under high pressure (100 bar).

The National Hydrogen Mission will enable India to build capabilities to produce at least 5 million metric tonnes (MMT) of Green Hydrogen per annum by 2030, with the potential to reach 10 MMT per annum with additional demand for exports which would require substantial investments in generation and transportation, the firm said.

- The new hydrogen-compliant API X65 grade pipes can be used for transportation of 100% pure gaseous hydrogen.

The demand for steel compliant with hydrogen transportation is expected to start from 2026-27, with the total steel requirement of 350KT spanning over the next 5 to 7 years. While various mechanisms of hydrogen transportation are available, steel pipelines are considered economically more viable for mass transportation. *—PTI*

Planters and exporters also raised questions over the alleged 'mismatch' between the export data. *PHOTO: PTI*

TEA PLANTERS FUME AT MIXED TEA

KOLKATA, 29 JAN

Resentment is brewing in the tea industry as planters and exporters are alleging that "inferior quality" imported tea is being blended with the Indian crop and exported without multi-origin tag by a few stakeholders, which is not only "undermining prices" but also "posing a threat" to the reputation of the country's tea in overseas market.

They also claimed that low priced tea, being imported from Kenya, Nepal, Vietnam and Iran, is also made available in the domestic market, which, they touted, as one of the reasons for the falling prices of the commodity despite a shortfall in production. Planters and exporters also raised questions over the alleged "mismatch" between the export data of the Tea Board of Kenya, and the import data of Tea Board India during the January-October period in 2024. *—PTI*

Tickets for WTC Final to go on sale from 31 January

DUBAI, 29 JAN

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday announced that tickets for the World Test Championship final between South Africa and Australia at Lord's are set to go on general sale from 31 January. Reigning champions Australia booked their place in the 2025 decider when defeating India 3-1 in the recent Border-Gavaskar series, while the Proteas cruised past Pakistan 2-0 on home soil to ensure they will feature in the one-off Test for the first time at the clash at Lord's set to commence on 11 June. With tickets for the one-off Test to go on sale from 10 am GMT (UK time) and 3:30 pm (IST) on January 31, priority fans, including ICC Family, will benefit from exclusive access to tickets, with a 48-hour priority window active from 10h 00 GMT on 29 January. Reigning champions Australia booked their place in the 2025 decider when defeating India 3-1 in the recent Border-Gavaskar series, while the Proteas cruised past Pakistan 2-0 on home soil to ensure they will feature in the one-off Test for the first time at the clash at Lord's set to commence on11 June. With tickets for the one-off Test to go on sale from 10 am GMT (UK time) and 3:30 pm (IST) on 31 January, priority fans, including ICC Family. *—PTI*

Ranji gets Kohli boost as Delhi aims to end on high

Karnataka gets KL Rahul in crucial tie against Haryana

NEW DELHI, 31 JAN

Virat Kohli's magnetic presence has not only lifted the profile of the Ranji Trophy but also the Delhi team's sagging spirits as it eyes a winning end to an otherwise listless campaign in the final group D game against Railways starting here on Thursday.

Interestingly, Railways (17 points from six games) have more than a fair shot at making the knock-out stages if they beat Delhi with bonus points and take their tally to 24.

Delhi (14 from six games) only has mathematical impossibility to rely upon but the 10,000-odd crowd expected to watch isn't bothered about the results. Tamil Nadu (25 points from six games), Chandigarh (19 from six games), and Saurashtra (18 from six games) are in a better position compared to these two teams in terms of probability of qualification. If Delhi bowls first, the turnout is not going to exceed 3000 but in case Delhi is batting first, the crowd would prefer a Sanat Sangwan or Arpit Rana to get out quickly and make way for Kohli.

But what would happen if the 'King' gets out early? For starters, Ranji Trophy will go back to being 'Ranji Trophy' with four journalists and 200 odd spectators taking interest in the proceedings.

Kohli's comeback that the Feroz Shah Kotla ground will have broadcasters joining the festivities

KL Rahul *PHOTO: PTI*

Such has been the interest level in Kohli's comeback that the Feroz Shah Kotla ground will have broadcasters joining the festivities and gearing up for the live stream of the match, which is the star batter's first Ranji outing in 12 years and three months.

It is expected that Kohli will come in place of left-hander Jonty Sidhu, whose form has tapered off in the past few games as he didn't get enough chances.

Kerala push for QF berth

Locked in a three-way tussle for a quarterfinal berth, Karnataka will have KL Rahul's experience to bank on in the quest for a bonus point win over table-toppers Haryana in their final league match of the Ranji Trophy Elite Group C, beginning here on Thursday. Karnataka currently has 19 points and Haryana has 26 points, but Kerala with 21 points is putting pressure on both teams.

A win even without a bonus point will take Kerala to 27 points, and they will end up as Group C leaders. In that event, Haryana, who will stay on 26 points, will be knocked out as Karnataka will have more bonus point wins (2) to their credit than Haryana (1).

The group-toppers are decided by bonus point wins this season against the net run rate or head-to-head record as it has been the case in the previous editions of the tournament. If Karnataka garners six points here, then they will have 25 points and will have to hope that Kerala does not get anything more than a draw against Bihar, who will then have a maximum of 24 points. If the match here ends in a draw and Karnataka gains the first-innings lead for three points, then the eight-time champions will have 22 points. *—PTI*

TATA STEEL MASTERS

Gukesh beats Mendonca to jump into sole lead

WIJK AAN ZEE, 29 JAN

- World Champion D Gukesh crashed through the defenses of compatriot Leon Luke Mendonca in the ninth round to jump into sole lead at the Tata Steel Master here

World Champion D Gukesh crashed through the defenses of compatriot Leon Luke Mendonca in the ninth round to jump into sole lead at the Tata Steel Master here.

On a day when R Praggnanandhaa lost his first game against Dutch GM Anish Giri, veteran P Harikrishna also found himself under the spotlight, falling to Russian-turned-Slovenian Vladimir Fedoseev.

"I'm happy that I played a good game today and there are still four rounds left so I'm not thinking much about the standings. I'm just happy as to how I am playing," Gukesh said after his game.

With the win, Gukesh took his tally to 6.5 points out of a possible nine and a half points ahead of Uzbek Nodirbek Abdusattorov and Russian-turned-Slovenian Fedoseev, who are both on 6 points.

Praggnanadhaa on 5.5 points shares the fourth spot and it remains to be seen if things are going to get better for the Indian.

Results Round 9 Masters:

Anish Giri (Ned, 4.5) beat R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 5.5); D Gukesh (Ind, 6.5) beat Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 2.5); Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 6) beat P Harikrishna (4); Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 3.5) drew with Max Warmerdam (3.5); Wei Yi (Chn, 5) drew with Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 2.5); Alexey Sarana (Srb, 5) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 3.5); Fabiano Caruana (USA, 5) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 6). *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

WWE superstar suffers multiple injuries

LONDON, 29 JAN

Wrestler JD McDonagh was rushed to the hospital after his risky move went wrong during WWE Raw on Tuesday (IST). McDonagh, who was competing in a World Tag Championship alongside Dominik Mysterio, springboarded a moonsault flip on War Raiders' Ivar. The move saw McDonagh make an awkward landing before whiplashing into the announcer's desk. The "Irish Ace" was seen whiplashing into the commentary table as he landed on Ivar with his head snapping back after direct contact between the top of the signage fence and his neck. *—PTI*

Oldest living Olympic gold medallist athlete dies

WASHINGTON, 29 JAN

American long jump great Greg Bell, who had been the oldest living Olympic gold medallist in athletics, has died at the age of 94. Bell breathed his last on January 25, according to World Athletics which paid tribute to the 1956 Olympic long jump gold medallist."World Athletics is deeply saddened to hear that Greg Bell, the 1956 Olympic long jump champion, died on Saturday at the age of 94. He had been the oldest living Olympic gold medallist in athletics," it said.*—PTI*

We will be ready: PCB on Pakistan's CT readiness

KARACHI, 29 JAN

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) insists that the National Stadium here will be ready to host matches of the upcoming Champions Trophy despite mounting concerns around the venue's preparedness for the marquee event starting 19 February. Pakistan's respected leading English daily 'Dawn' on Wednesday carried a story which stated that "it seems impossible to contemplate the renovation work being completed within the deadline, but the personnel handed the responsibility are beaming with confidence." "The board would either be hero or zero for taking up such a mammoth task," the newspaper commented. *—PTI*

38 NATIONAL GAMES

In the 200-metre freestyle at National Games, Kerala's Sajan finished with a time of 1 minute 53.73 seconds, securing third place. Karnataka's Srihari Nataraj won the gold, while Aneesh S Gowda claimed Silver *PHOTO: PTI*

Desinghu scoops 3 golds as K'taka tops medal tally

HALDWANI/ DEHRADUN, 29 JUNE

Fourteen-year-old swimmer Dhinidhi Desinghu was the cynosure of all eyes as she stamped her authority with three gold medals as Karnataka made a splash on the pool, grabbing five gold and two silver to take the top spot in the 38th National Games medal tally here on Wednesday.

At the end of the first day of competitions, Karnataka was the early leader with seven medals (5 gold, 2 silver) while Manipur (4 gold, 4 silver) was close second and Maharashtra (2 gold, 3 silver, 3 bronze) third in the standings.

The day certainly belonged to Desinghu, who first won the women's 200m freestyle event in a Games record time of 2 minutes and 3.24 seconds before adding a gold each in 100m butterfly and 4x100m freestyle. The earlier 200m freestyle national record of 2:07.08 was in the name of Desinghu's state-mate Hashika Ramachandra set during the 2022 Games in Gujarat.Bhavya Sachdeva (2:08.68) of Delhi and Aditi Satish Hegde (2:09.74) of Maharashtra were distant second and third respectively in the women's 200m freestyle.In the women's 100m butterfly, Desinghu clocked 1:03.62 to climb to the top of the podium for the second time in the day.It was 1-2 for Karnataka as Naisha Shetty (1:04.81) took the silver while Shristi Upadhaya (1:05.20) of Odisha grabbed the bronze.It was not done yet for Desinghu as she anchored the Karnataka quartet to women's 4x100m freestyle gold in a time of 4:01.58. The other members of the team were Nina Venkatesh, Shalini R Dixit, and Latiesha Mandana. Maharashtra (4:02.17) and Tamil Nadu (4:08.81) won the silver and bronze respectively.Another Games record was erased with Karnataka also pocketing the men's 4x100m freestyle gold with the team of Srihari Nataraj, Aneesh S Gowda, Akash Mani and Chinatan S Shetty clocking 3:26.26.Tamil Nadu (3:29.92) and Gujarat (3:32.23) took the silver and bronze respectively.Nataraj won his second gold of the day, clocking 1:50.57 in the men's 200m freestyle with state-mate Aneesh S Gowda (1:52.42) and Kerala's veteran swimmer Sajan Prakash (1:53.73) finishing second and third respectively. *—PTI*

Dhinidhi Desinghu

STEVE SMITH JOINS 10,000 TEST RUN CLUB

GALLE, 29 JAN

Steve Smith scored his 10,000th test run to put him in elite cricket company and Australia was 145-2 after winning the toss and batting Wednesday in the first test against Sri Lanka.

Smith needed only one run Wednesday to achieve the milestone, and he was 2 not out at lunch along with opener Usman Khawaja, who was unbeaten on 65. Smith was on 9,999 career test runs when he was dismissed in the fifth Australia-India test in Sydney earlier this month.

Smith became the 15th player in test cricket, and the fourth Australian, to score 10,000 runs in a career. He brought up the milestone on his first delivery, skipping down the wicket and punching a single to mid-on. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

WORLD-CLASS FIELD

Anirban Lahiri aims to break LIV Golf title drought at home

GURUGRAM, 29 JAN

Ace Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri is focused on achieving greater consistency and breaking his LIV Golf title drought when he tees up at the International Series India at DLF Golf and Country Club to kickstart the 2025 season on Thursday.

One of India's most accomplished golfers, the 37-year-old secured four top-10 finishes, including a runner-up finish at LIV Golf Andalucía, where he narrowly lost to Sergio Garcia in a playoff.

Lahiri acknowledges that while he has been competitive, his performances have been inconsistent and he is determined to "stick to the basics".

"I am very excited to come back to DLF. It's in brilliant condition. Having played here so many times, I've had good rounds and not-so-good rounds, but I've learned from all those experiences," the two-time Olympian told PTI Videos in an interview.

"I'm just going to stick to the basics hit fairways and greens -- and focus on doing things right this week."

The world-class field boasts of LIV Golf stars like reigning US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau and Joaquin Niemann, the 2024 International Series rankings winner along with top Indian contender SSP Chawrasia, a four-time European Tour winner.

"The last time I felt this kind of buzz was when Tiger Woods visited DGC. This is a similar vibe, and it's fantastic to be part of it.

"I'm trying to stay focused because I'm here as a competitor first. But I love the responsibility and I am grateful to Bryson, Joaquin, and everyone who agreed to come," he said.

Lahiri further acknowledged the challenges posed by the course, especially with its length and windy conditions. *—PTI*

I am very excited to come back to DLF. It's in brilliant condition

Nigeria women win nail-biter against Ireland

BANGI, 29 JUNE

Nigeria scripted the perfect ending to their U19 women's T20 World Cup campaign, clinching a six-run victory against Ireland in their Super Six match here at the YSD-UKM Cricket Oval on Wednesday.

With a win, Nigeria secured third place in Super Six Group 2, while Ireland's defeat meant they couldn't surpass New Zealand, finishing at the bottom of the group. Despite a slow start, Nigeria posted a tricky total of 94 in the early fixture after Niamh MacNulty won the toss and elected to bowl. Kia McCartney was the pick of Ireland's bowlers, finishing with 2-13 from four overs.

Losing key batter Victory Igbinedion in the first over and in the lurch at 18/3 inside five overs, Christabel Chukwuonye (25) led Nigeria's rebuild act with contributions from Omosigho Eguakun (17) and late flurries from Peculiar Agboya and Lilian Ude. Ireland suffered an early setback in their chase, losing a wicket in the first over, but Freya Sargent and Rebecca Lowe steadied the innings, guiding them to 30-2 by the end of the powerplay. However, regular wickets kept Nigeria in control despite some late resistance from Millie Spence and Kia McCartney. Nigeria managed to withstand the late scare, bowling out Ireland for 88 to secure a narrow 6-run victory. Lillian Ude was the standout performer with figures of 3/11, while Peace Usen and Anointed Akhigbe chipped in with two wickets each. *—PTI*

Nigeria scripted the perfect ending to their U19 women's T20 World Cup campaign *PHOTO: X*

AMID TALIBAN BAN

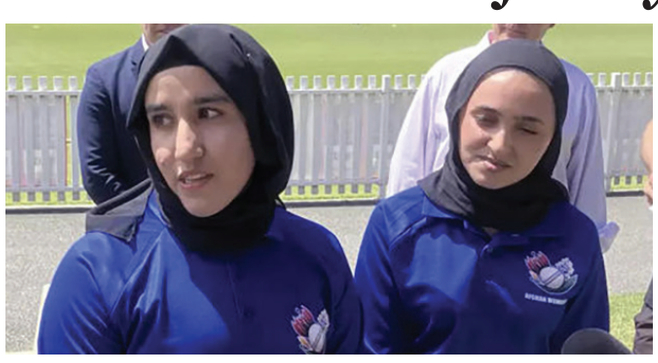
Afg's women cricketers reunite after 3 years in exile

MELBOURNE, 29 JAN

Cricketer Firooza Amiri says her team will "represent millions of women in Afghanistan who are denied their rights" when the side reunites after more than three years for an exhibition game in Australia on Thursday.

An Afghanistan Women's XI will play a Cricket Without Borders XI in the match at Melbourne's Junction Oval. It will bring together 21 female players who were formerly contracted by the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) before the Taliban regime re-took control in August 2021.

Since fleeing Afghanistan, the women were cricketers. banned from playing in their home country, have been based in Canberra and Melbourne, and playing for various club teams in local competitions.



Firooza Amiri and Nahida Sapan pose in their playing shirts ahead of the Afghanistan Women's XI match *PHOTO: X*

Amiri and Nahida Sapan, who will captain the Afghanistan Women's XI, thanked the Australian government and Cricket Australia for their support in promoting women's sport.

"It's very special for all of us to get back together after three years, leaving everything and losing everything back home in Afghanistan, and come together again," Amiri said this week.

Amiri was forced to flee her home country when the Taliban took control. She and her family first traveled to Pakistan and then were evacuated to Australia. "I also want to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who supports us. Your support means the world to us," Sapan said. "Together we are building not just a team. We are building a movement for change and improvement. *—PTI*

Katariya was named in India's FIH Pro League

NEW DELHI, 29 JAN

Veteran striker Vandana Katariya was on Wednesday named in the 24-member Indian women's hockey team for the Bhubaneswar leg of the FIH Pro League, beginning next month, while teenage forward Sonam was included as a standby.

India will face England, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany twice each from 15 February.

Dynamic midfielder Salima Tete will continue to lead the Indian team with forward Navneet Kaur serving as her deputy. Katariya, who was not a part of the squad for the women's Asian Champions Trophy, along with defenders Nikki Pradhan and Jyoti Chhatri, midfielder Baljeet Kaur, and forwards Mumtaz Khan and Rutaja Dadas have been added to the squad.

"This team brings a good blend of experienced players and exciting young talent, which will be crucial as we face top-level competition in the tournament. Our focus has been on building a balanced squad, with strong options in every position," Indian women's hockey team chief coach Harendra Singh said. *—PTI*